

JEFF SMITH

BONE



Includes a

NEW BONE CHAPTER

by Jeff Smith

and **A BONE Companion**

by Comics Librarian & Historian Stephen Weiner

BONE: CODA

Other Books by Jeff Smith

Published by Cartoon Books:
BONE One Volume Edition (Black & White)
RASL

Published by Graphix (an imprint of Scholastic Books):

BONE Color Series
Bone Volume 1: Out from Boneville
Bone Volume 2: The Great Cow Race
Bone Volume 3: Eyes of the Storm
Bone Volume 4: The Dragonslayer
Bone Volume 5: Rock Jaw, Master of the Eastern Border
Bone Volume 6: Old Man's Cave
Bone Volume 7: Ghost Circles
Bone Volume 8: Treasure Hunters
Bone Volume 9: Crown of Horns
Bone Handbook
Bone: Rose
(Written by Jeff Smith, Painted by Charles Vess)
Bone: Tall Tales
(Written by Jeff Smith and Tom Sniegowski, Drawn by Jeff Smith)
Bone: Quest for the Spark Book 1
(Written by Tom Sniegowski, Illustrated by Jeff Smith)
Bone: Quest for the Spark Book 2
(Written by Tom Sniegowski, Illustrated by Jeff Smith)
Bone: Quest for the Spark Book 3
(Written by Tom Sniegowski, Illustrated by Jeff Smith)

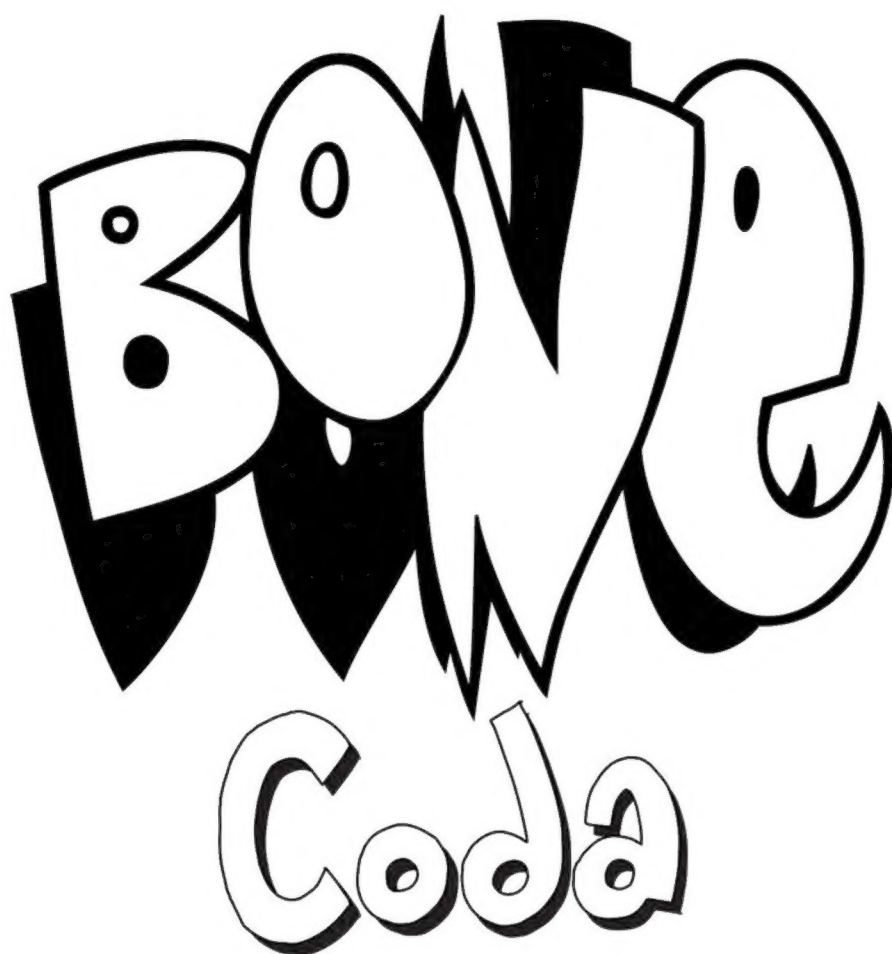
Published by Toon Books:
Little Mouse Gets Ready!

Published by DC Comics:
Shazam! The Monster Society of Evil

Available in fine bookstores and comic shops everywhere
For more information visit us at www.boneville.com

Facebook: The Official Jeff Smith Page
Twitter: @jeffsmithsbone

For more information about the BONE color series visit:
www.scholastic.com/bone



BONE

Coda

By Jeff Smith

with A BONE Companion
by Stephen Weiner

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DEDICATIONS:

For the community of comics lovers everywhere:
readers, creators, distributors, publishers, librarians,
retailers, critics, and journalists.

Thank you.

- Jeff

For Julian, my son,
1988-2013

- Stephen

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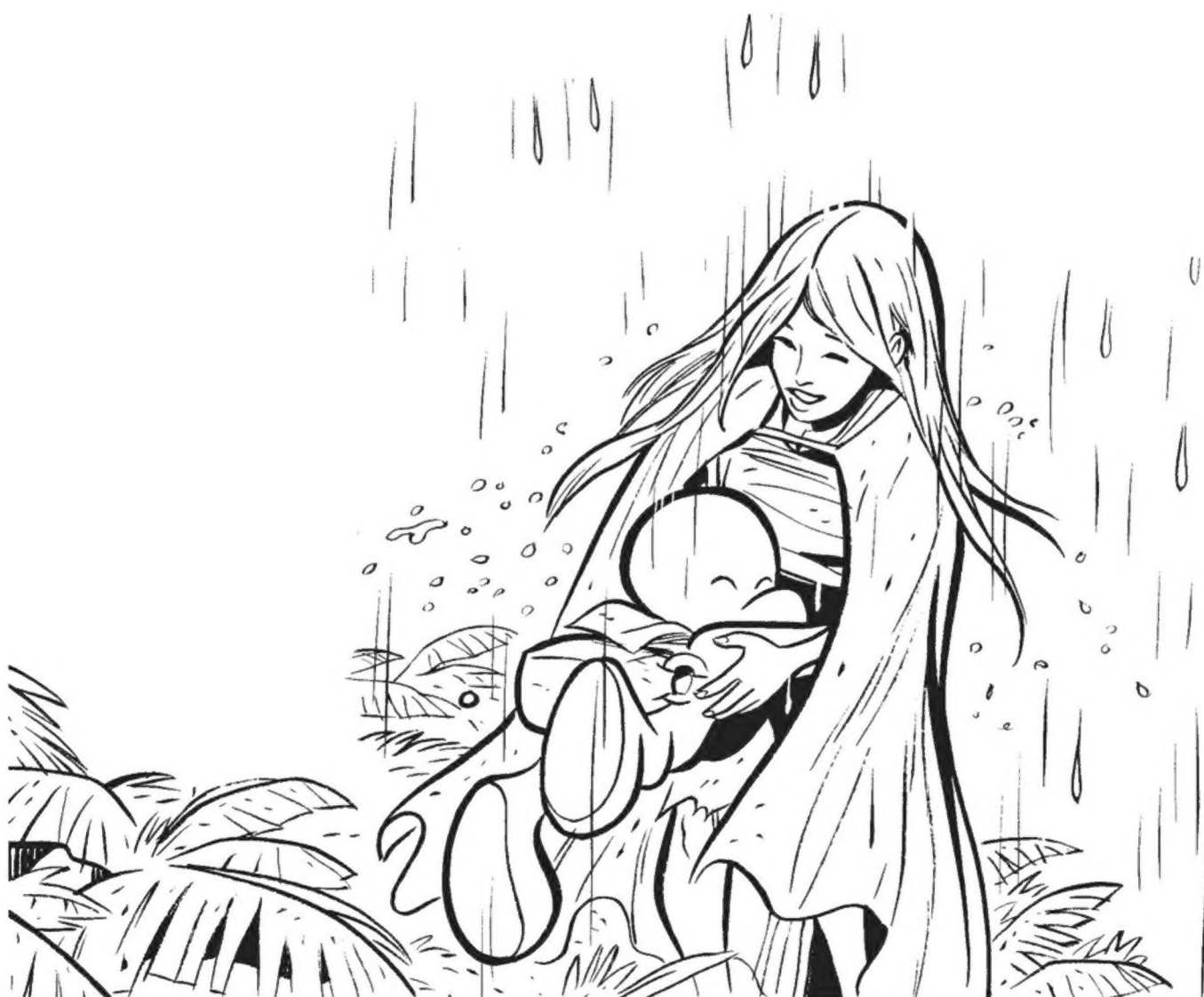
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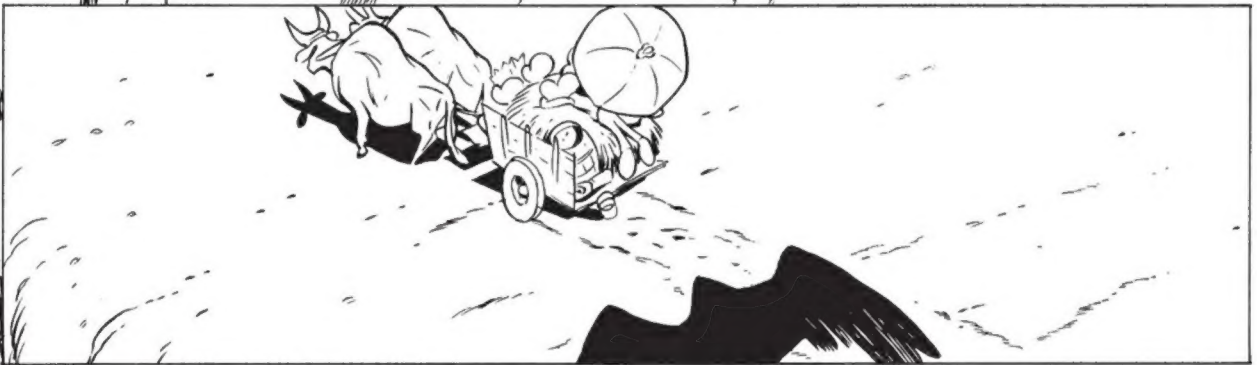
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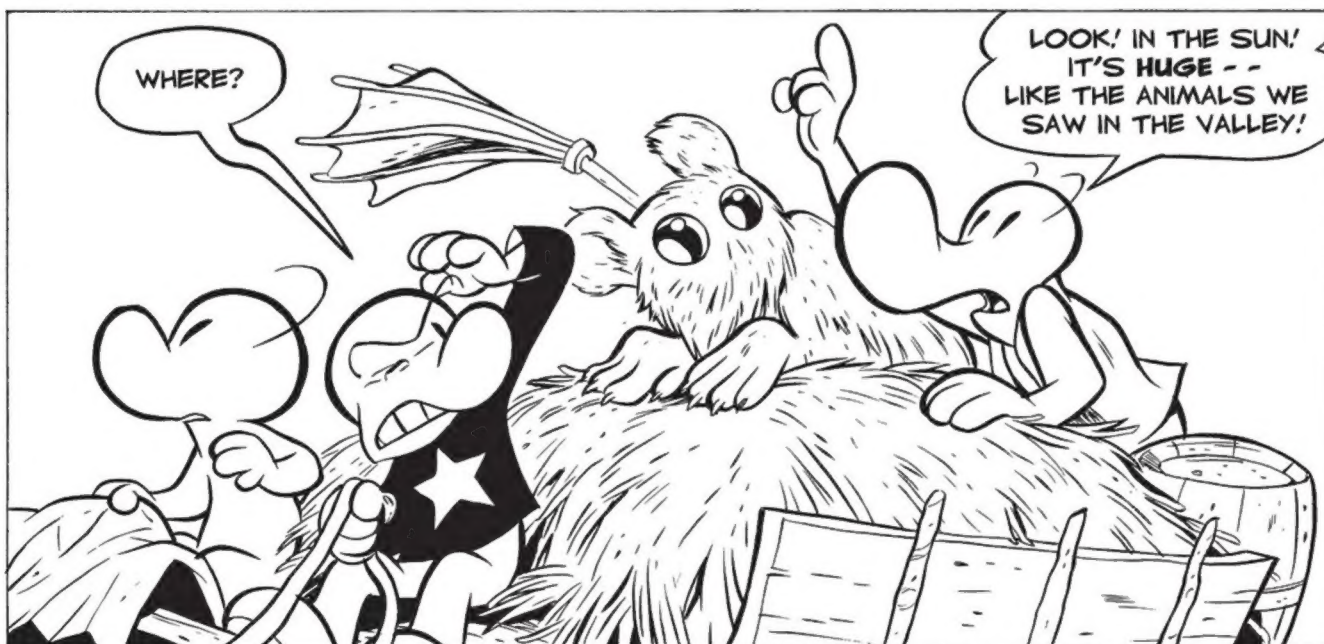
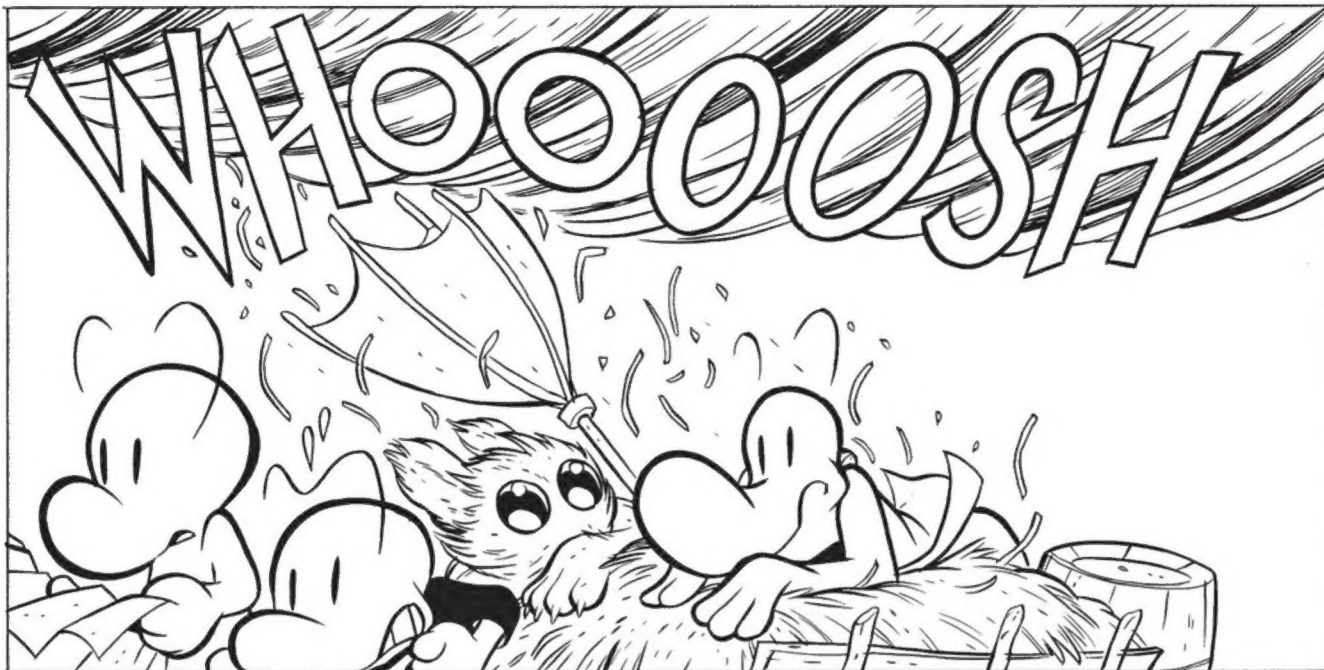
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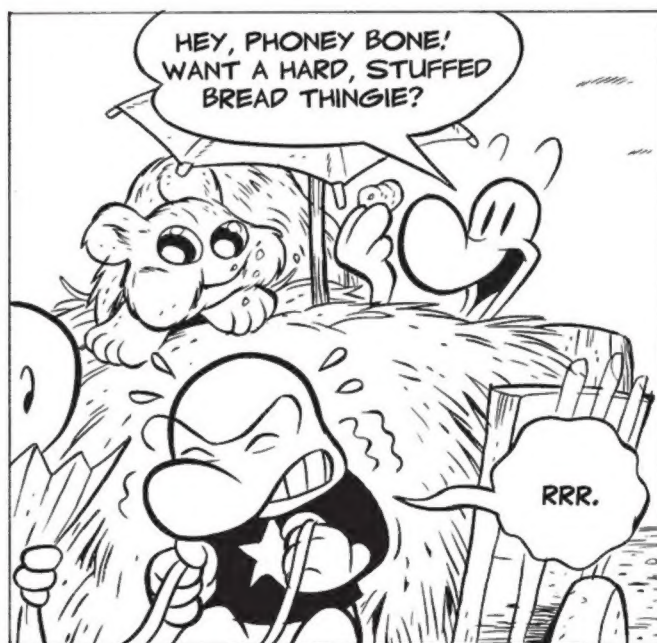
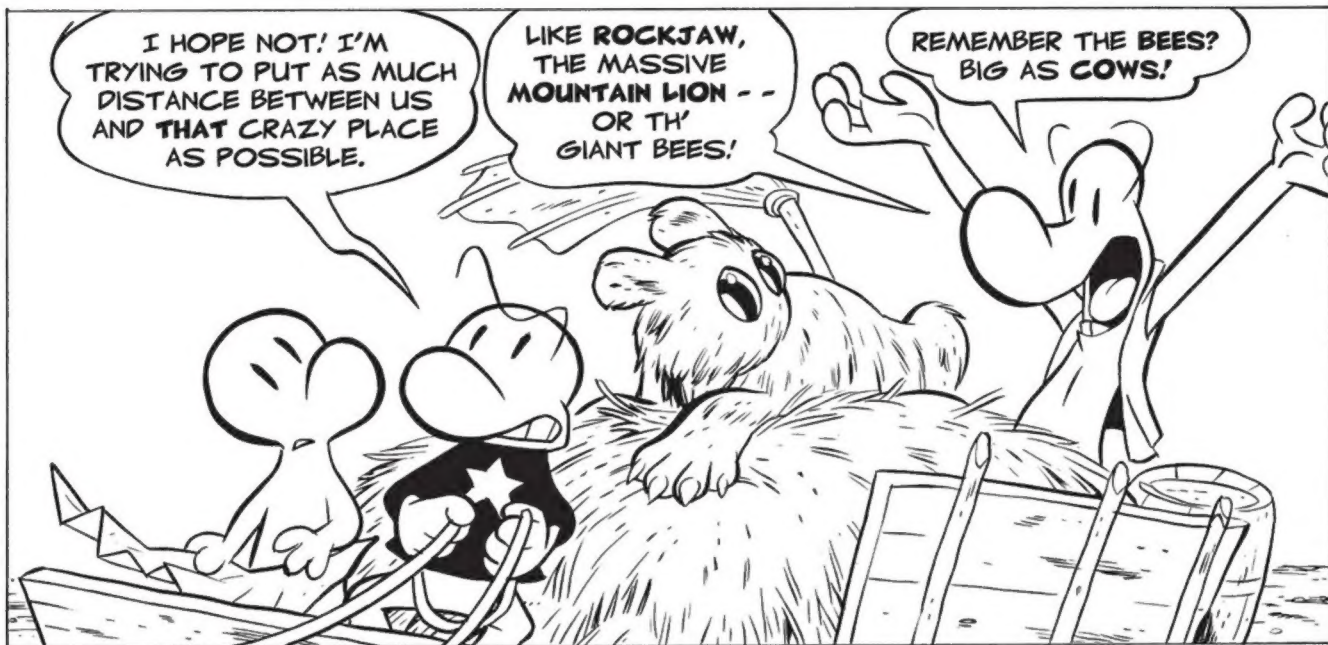
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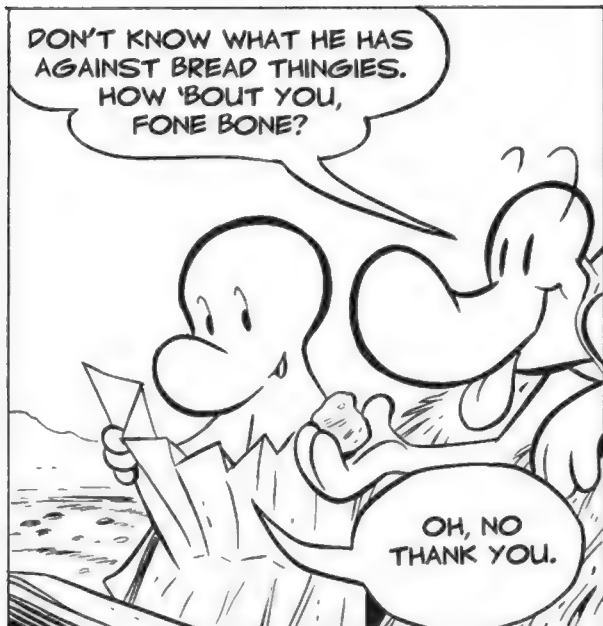


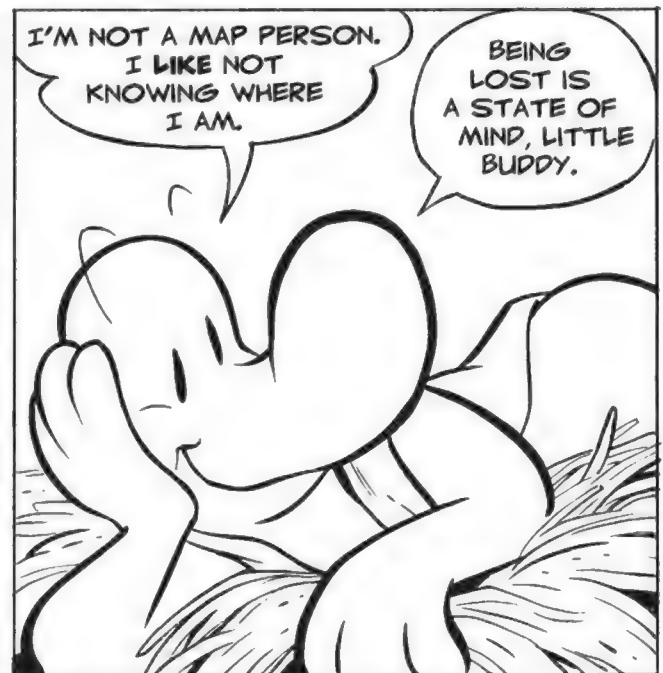
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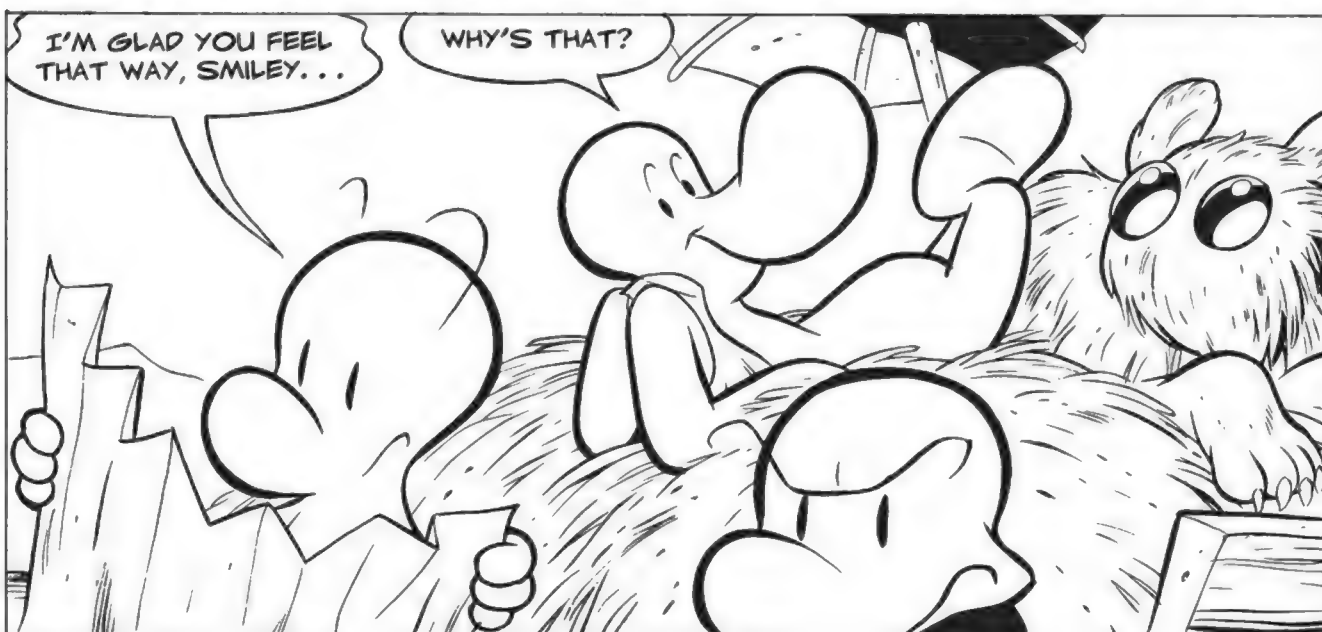


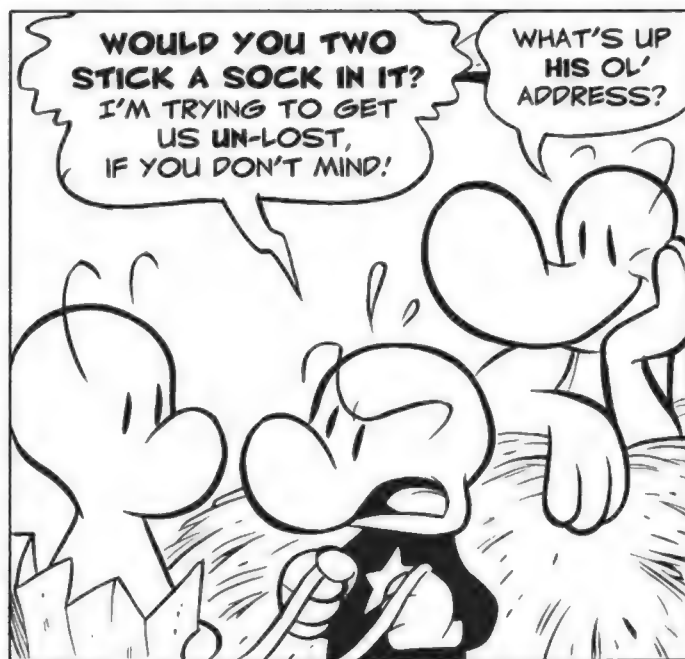
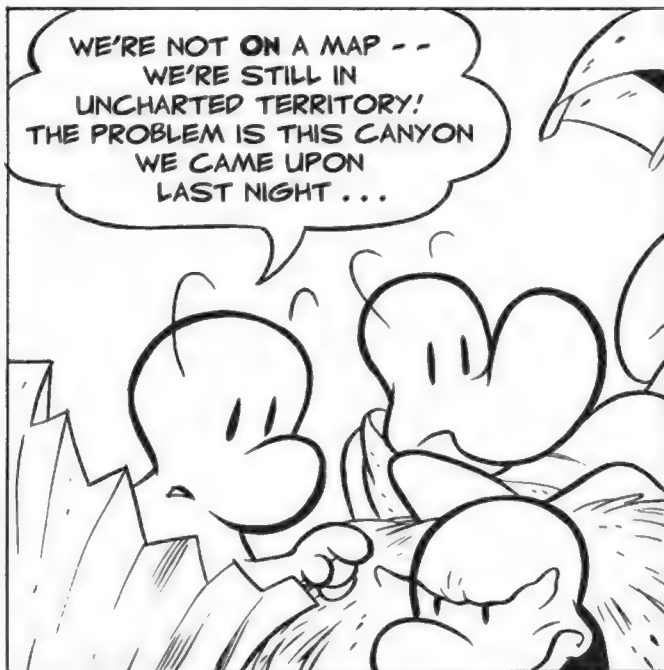


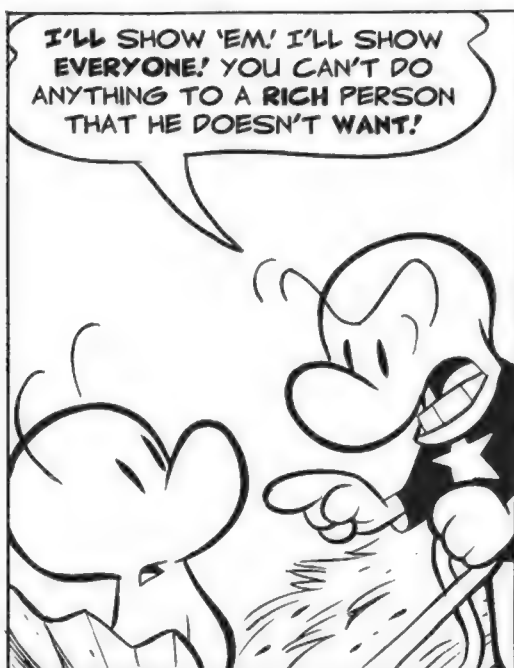
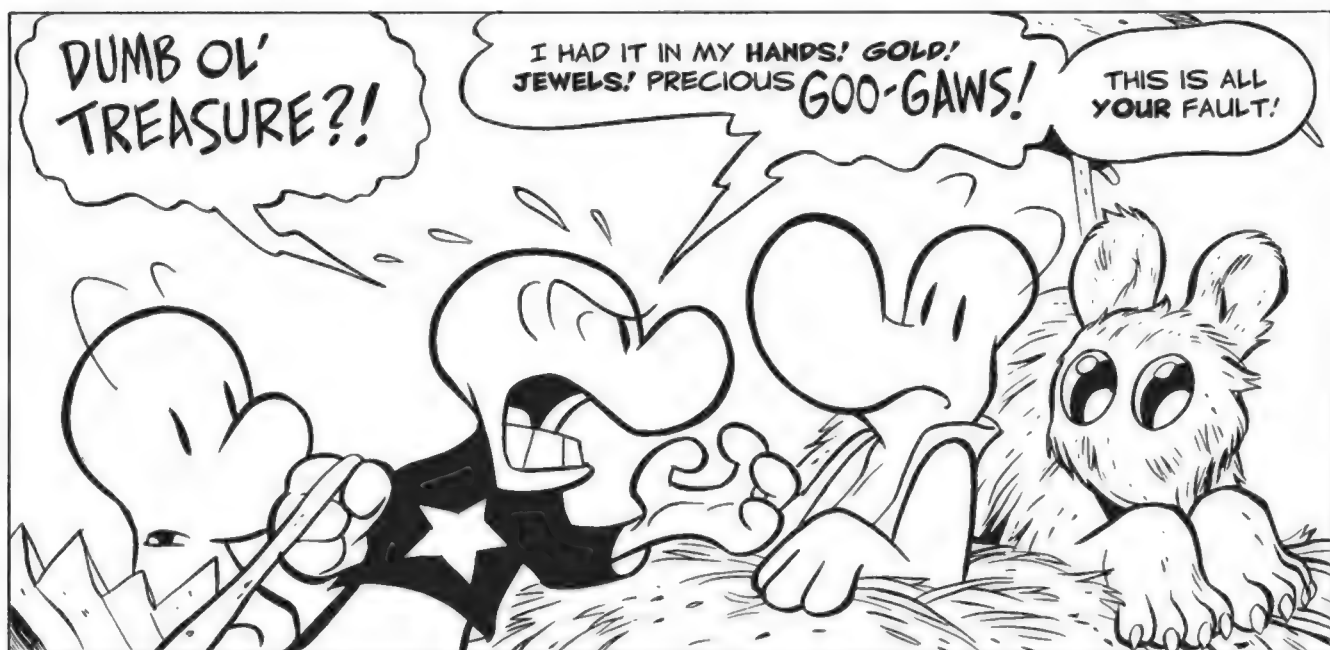






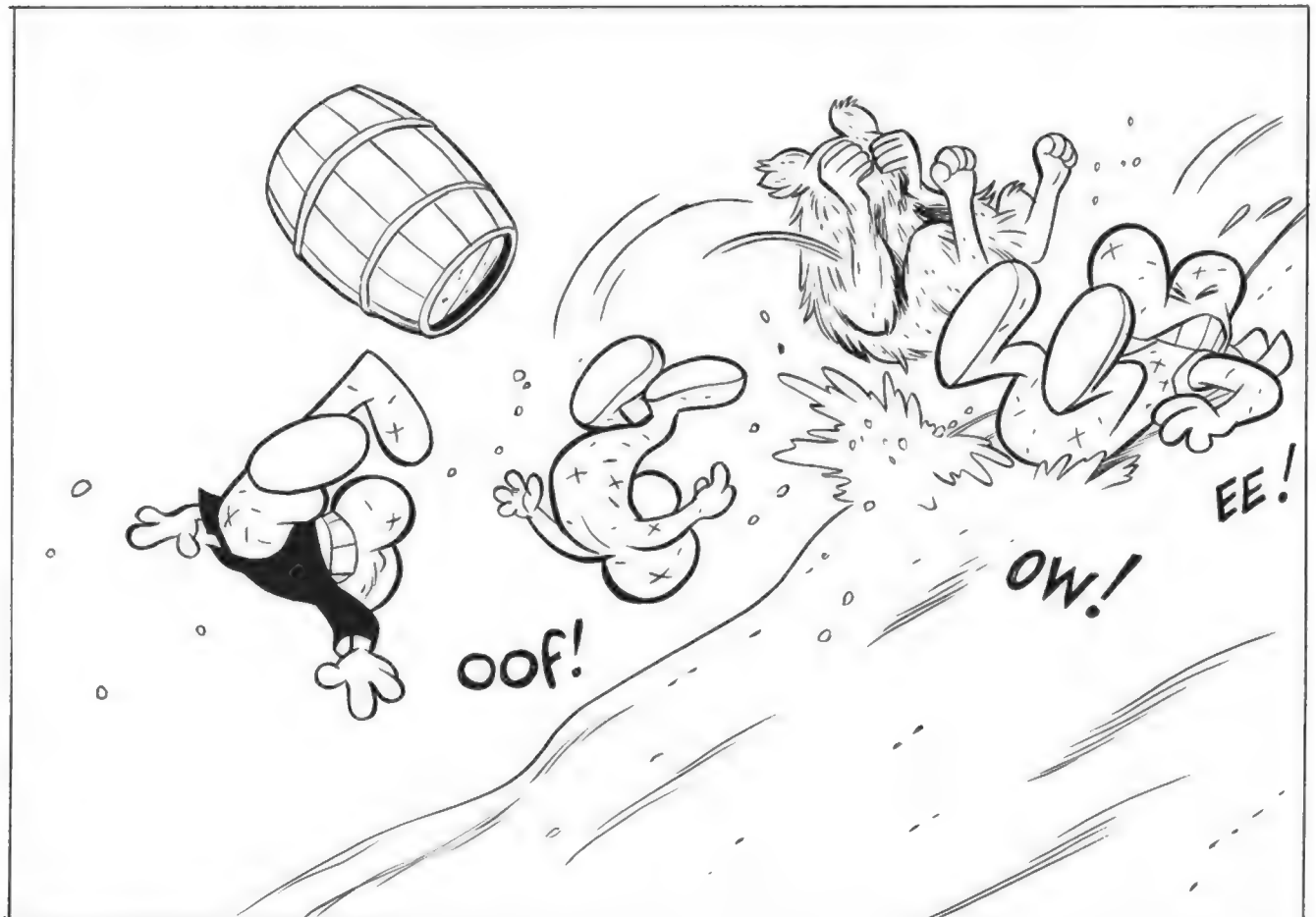
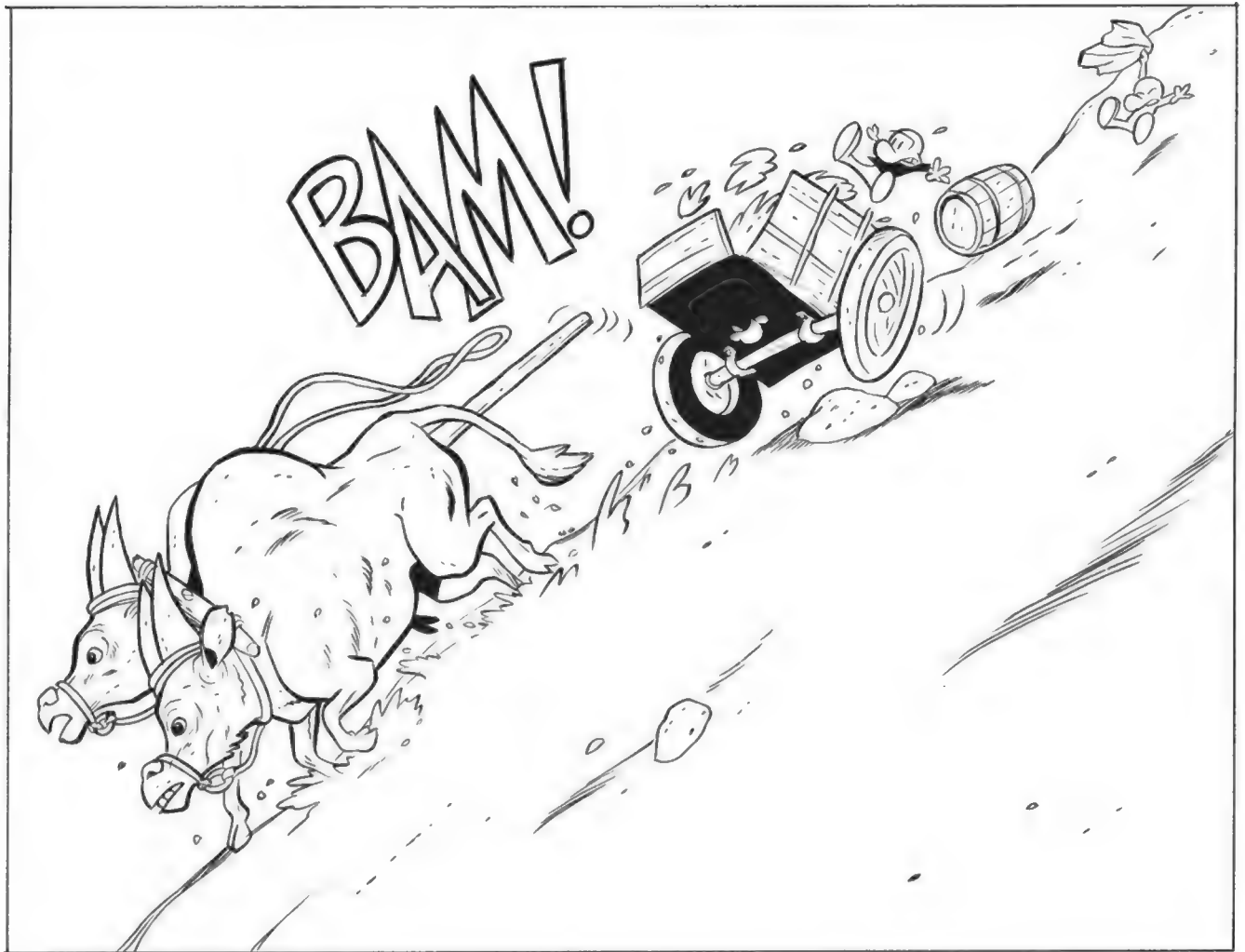




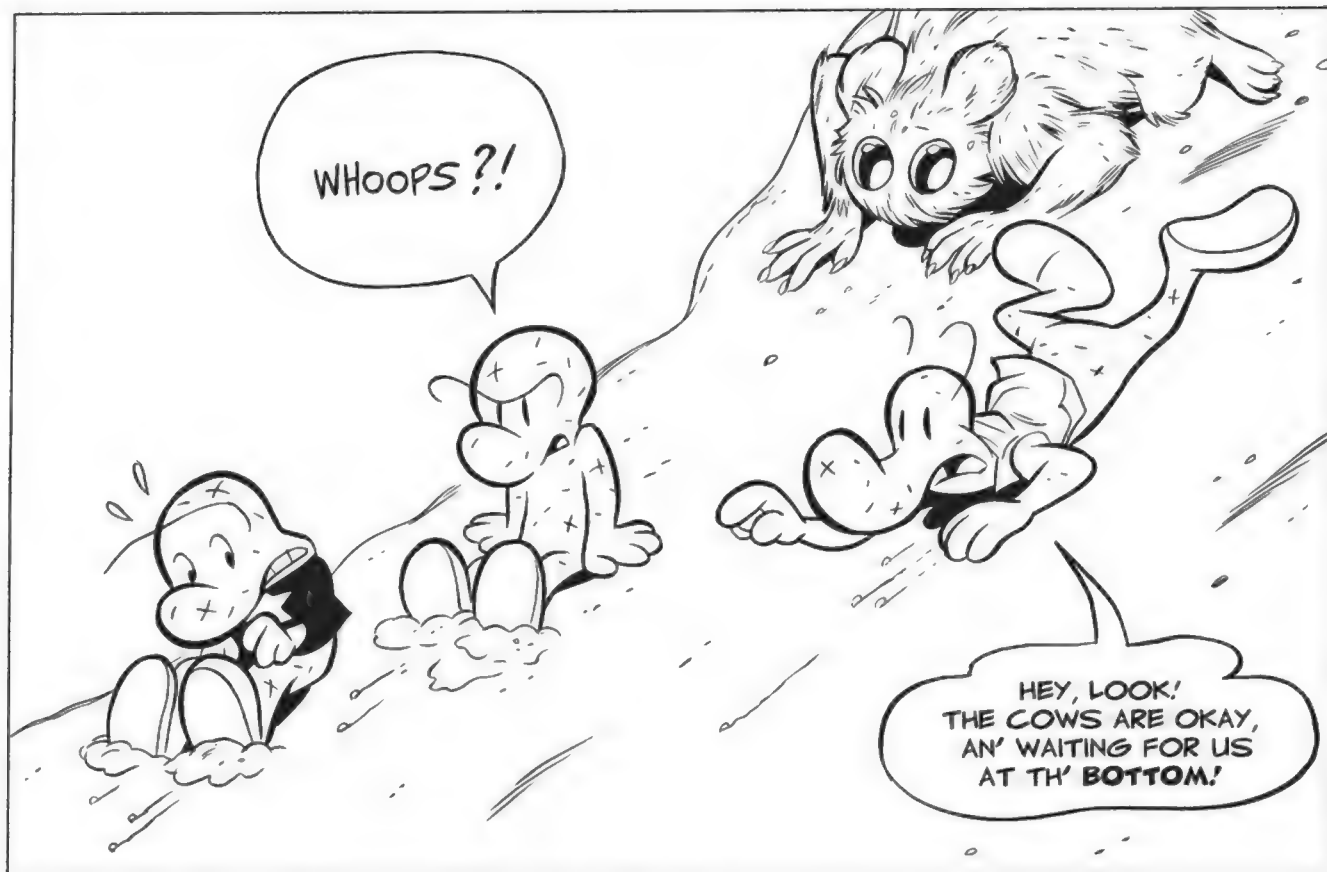


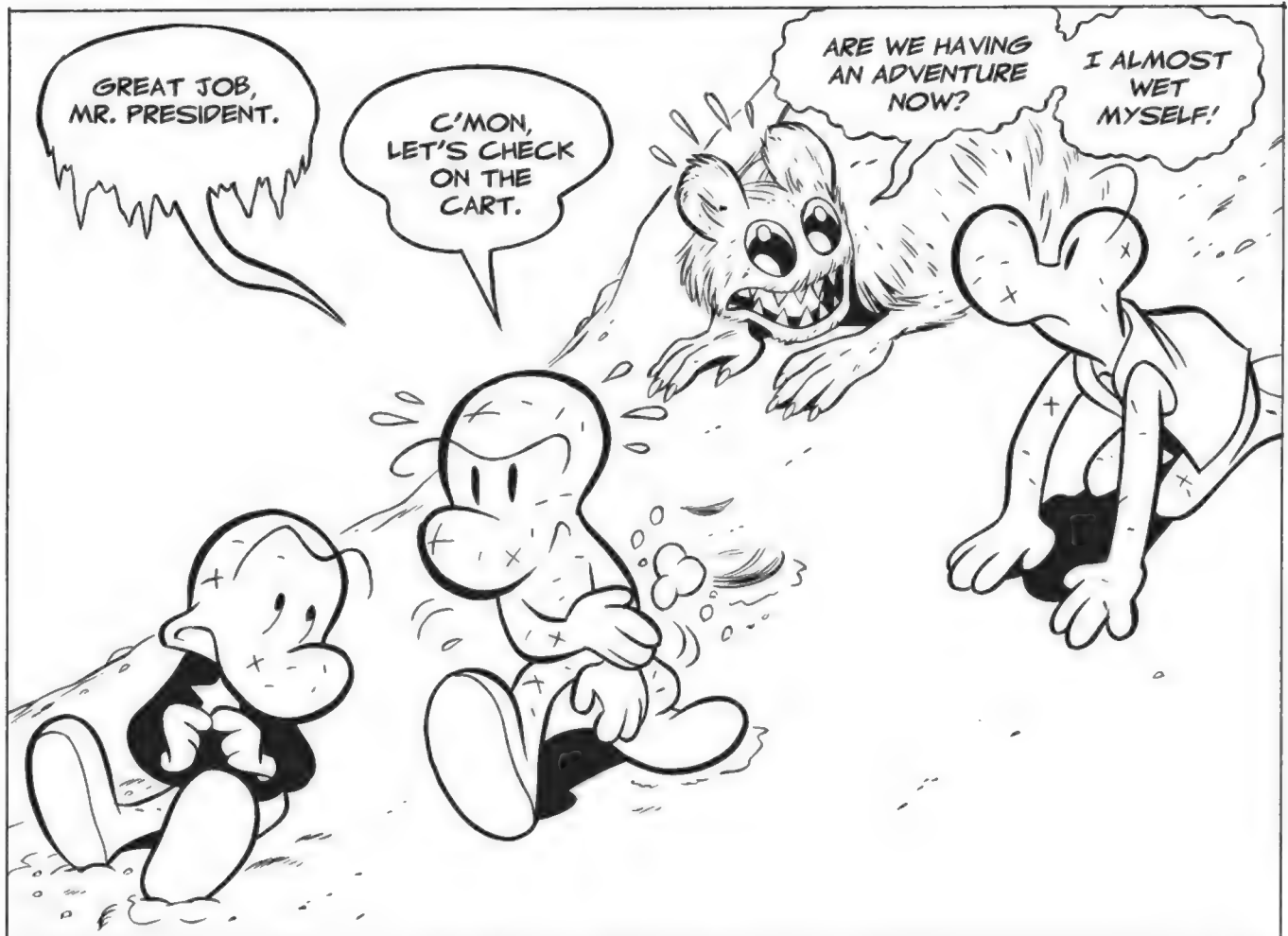










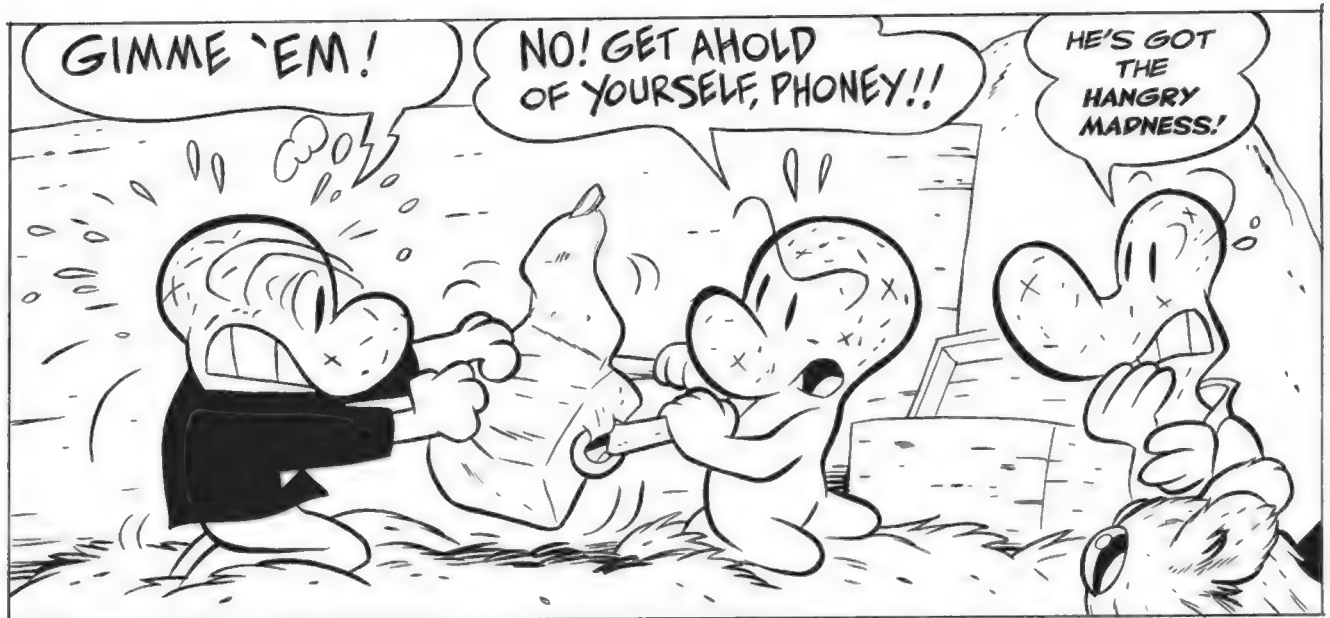


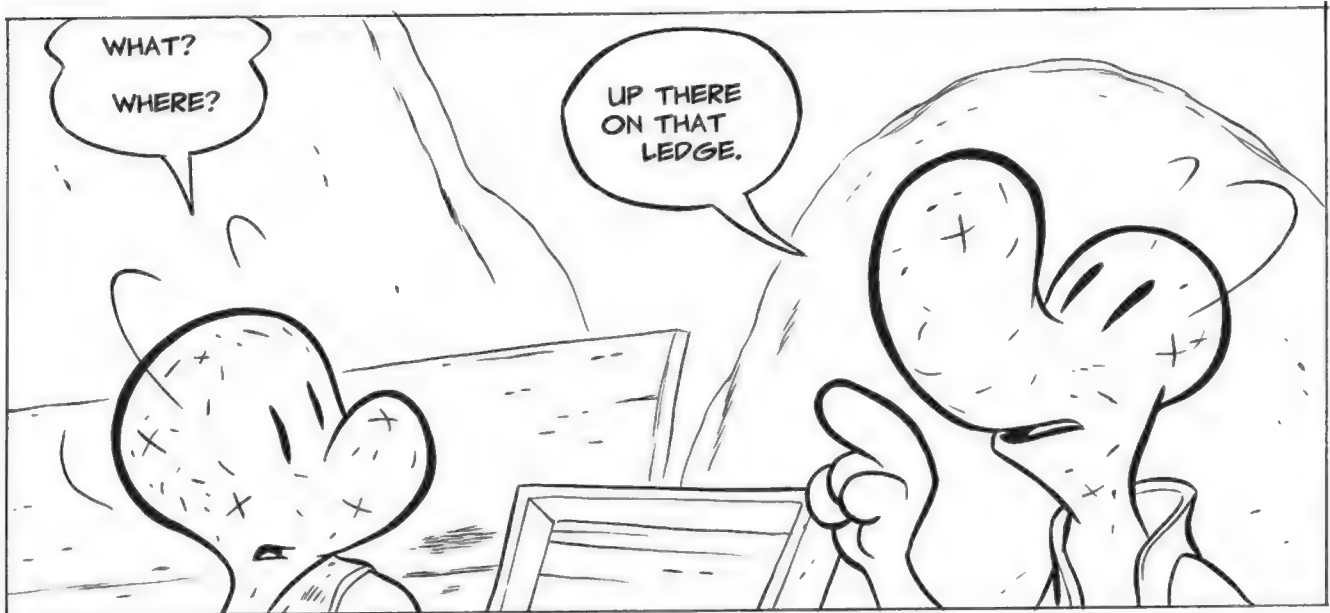


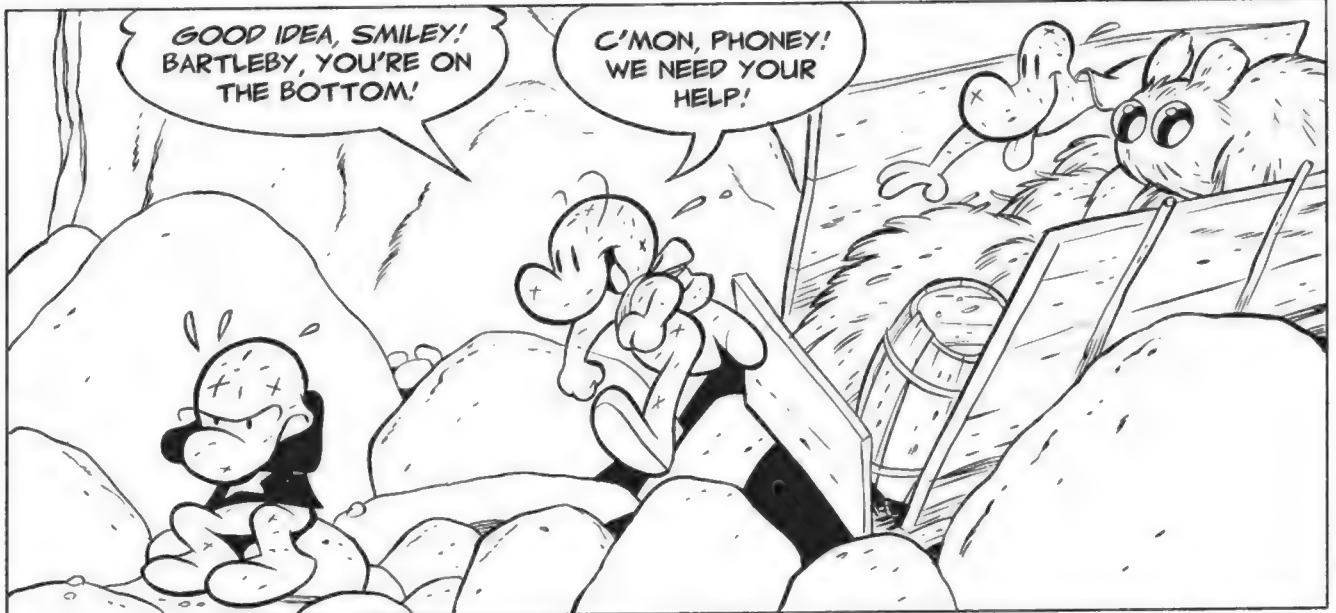
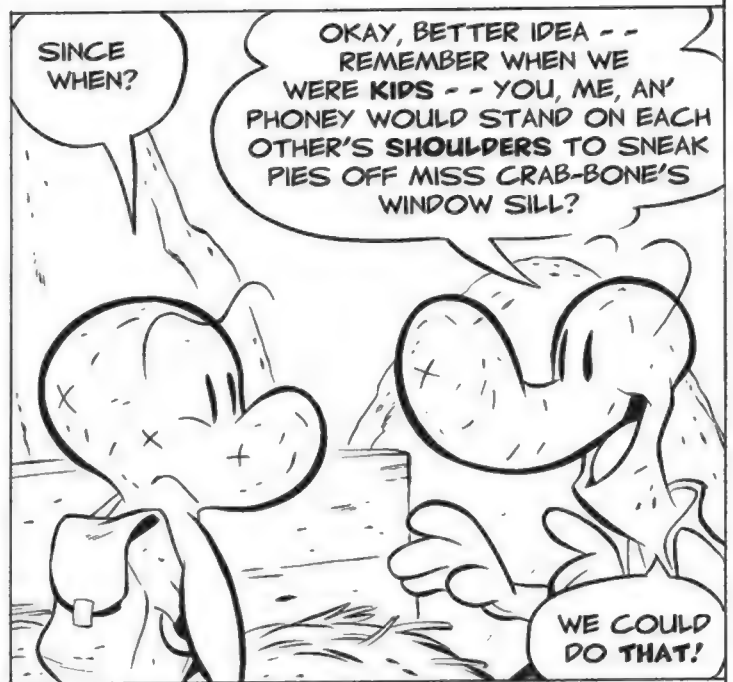
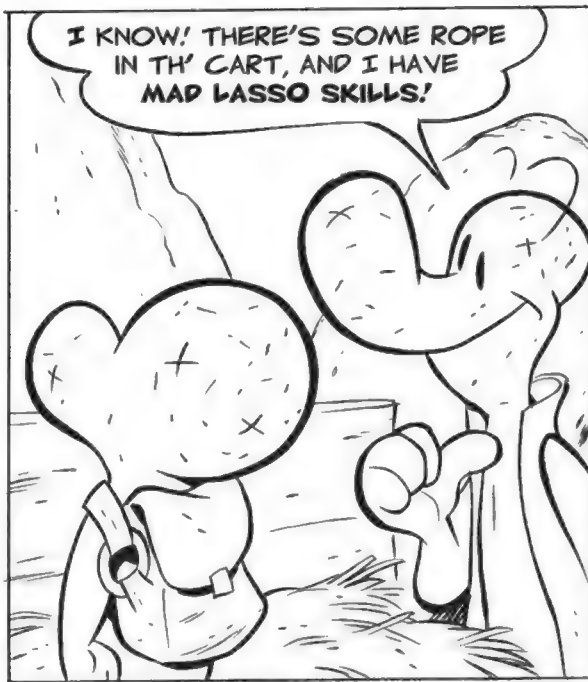


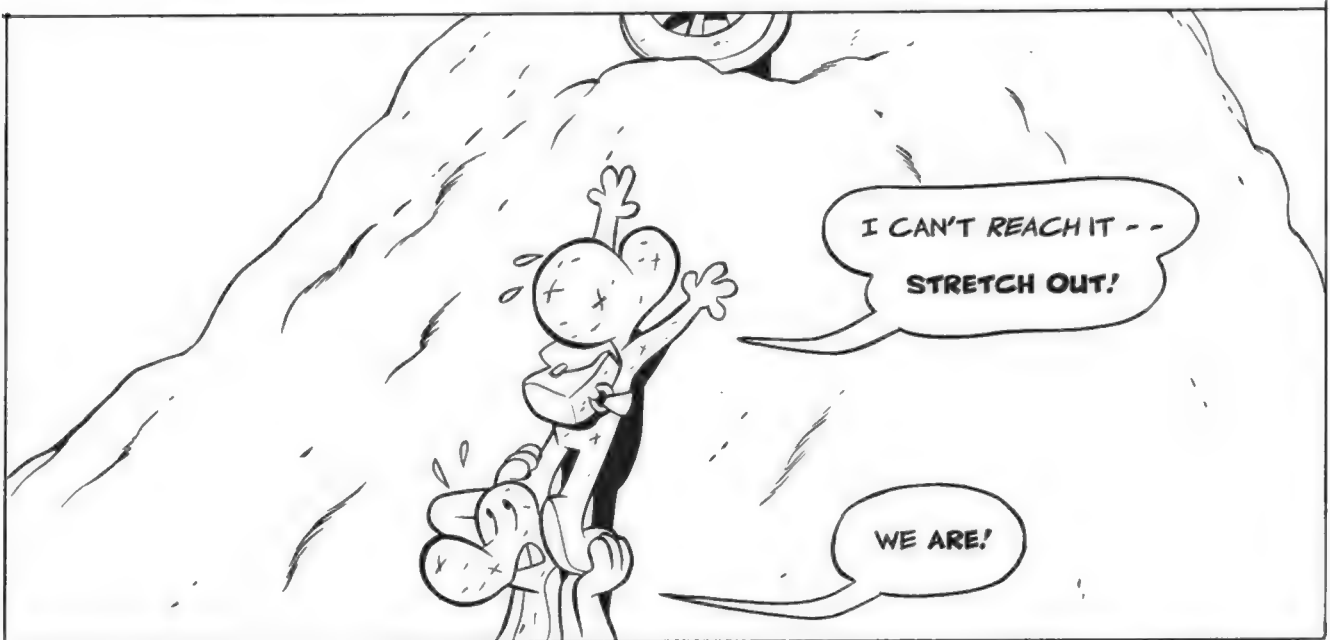
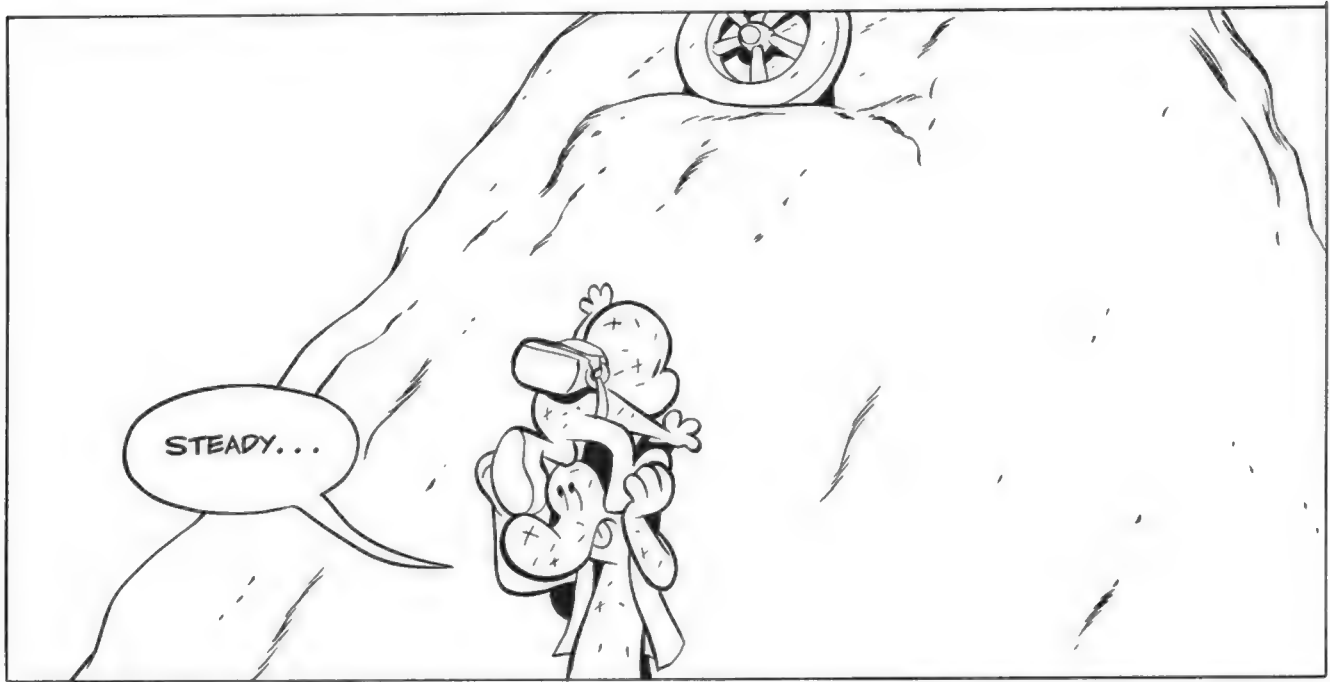


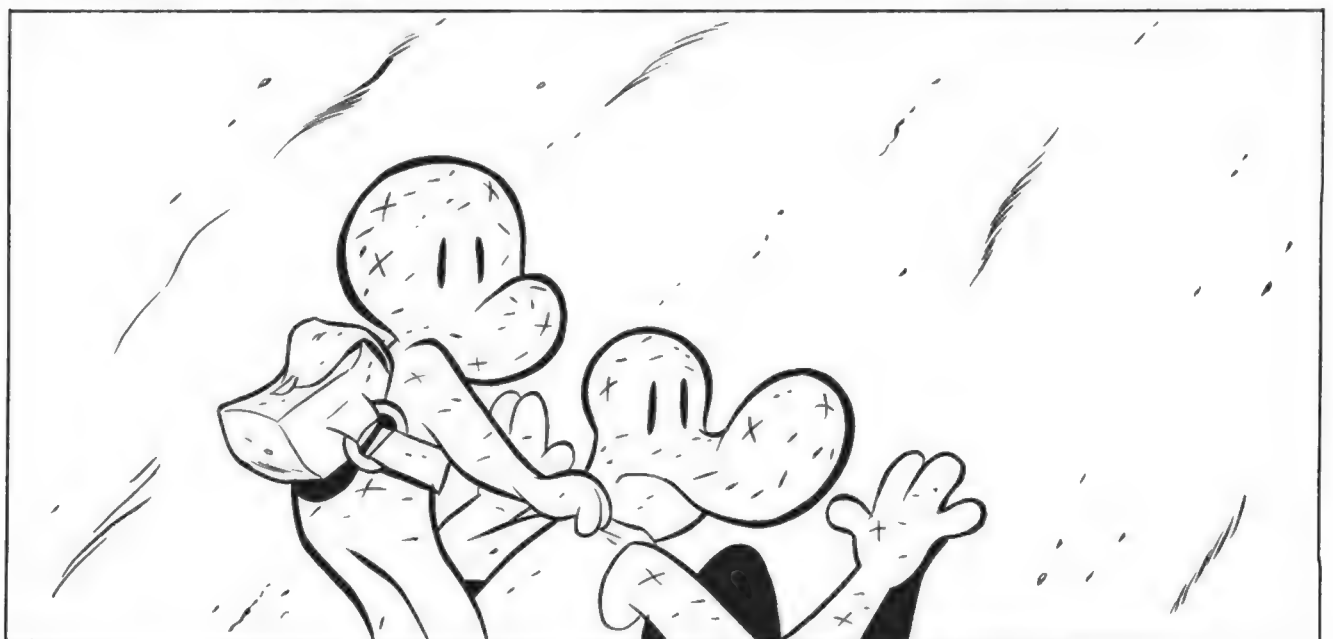
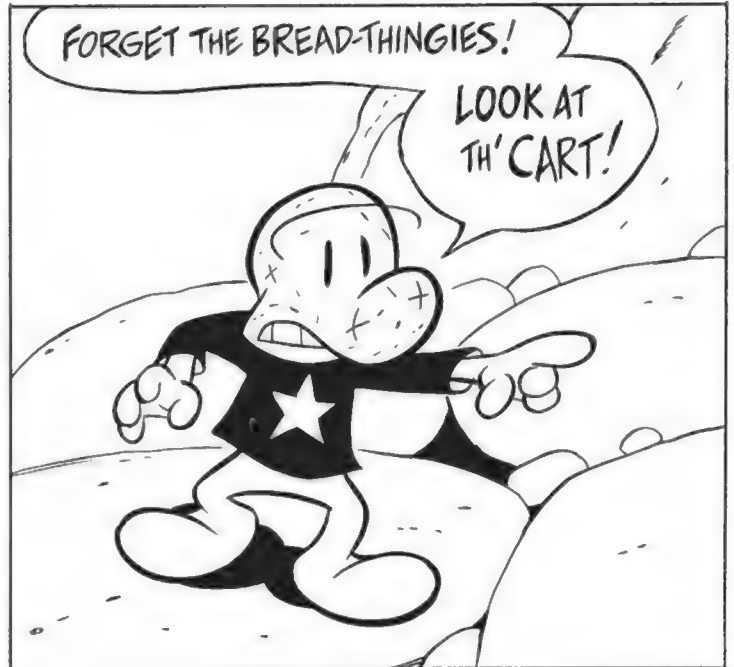
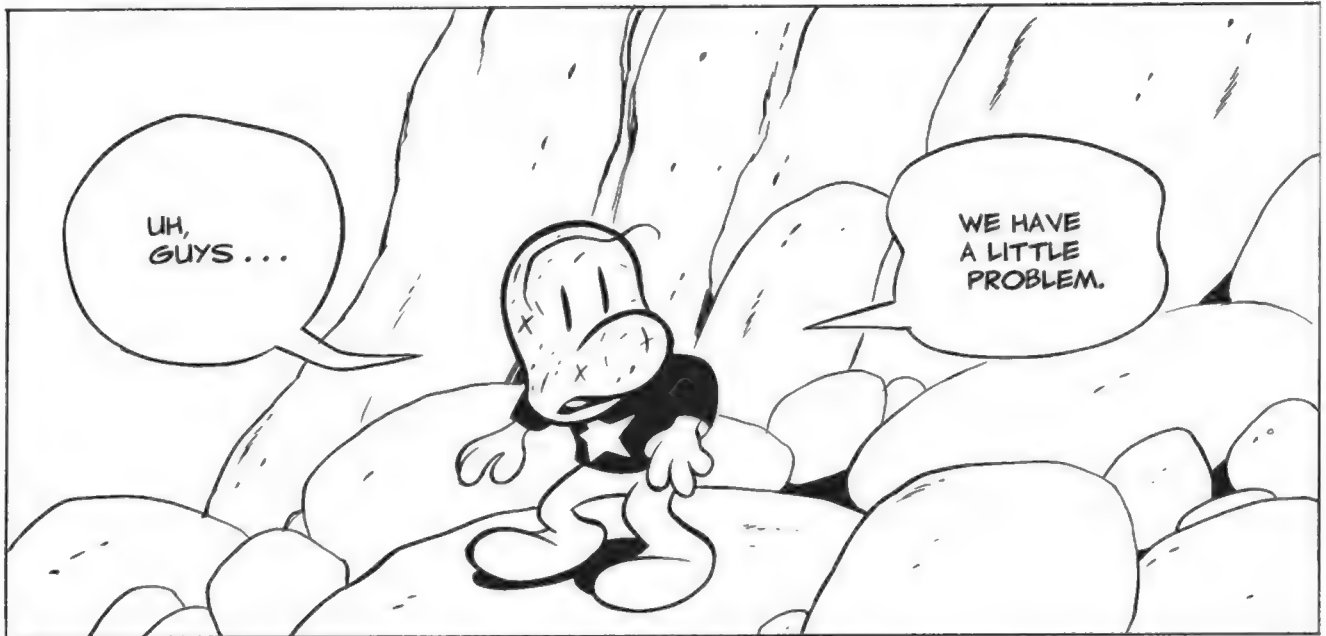


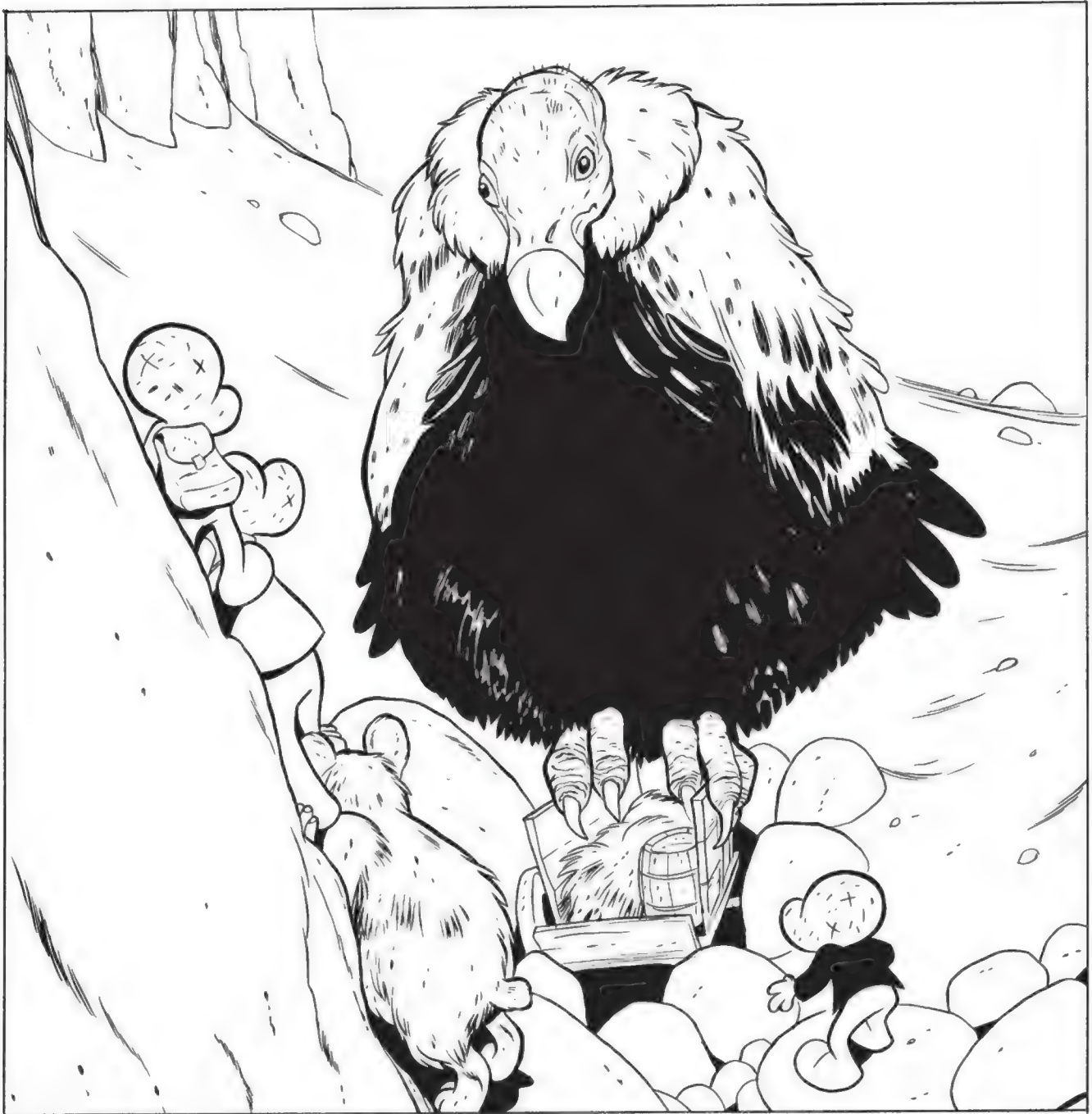


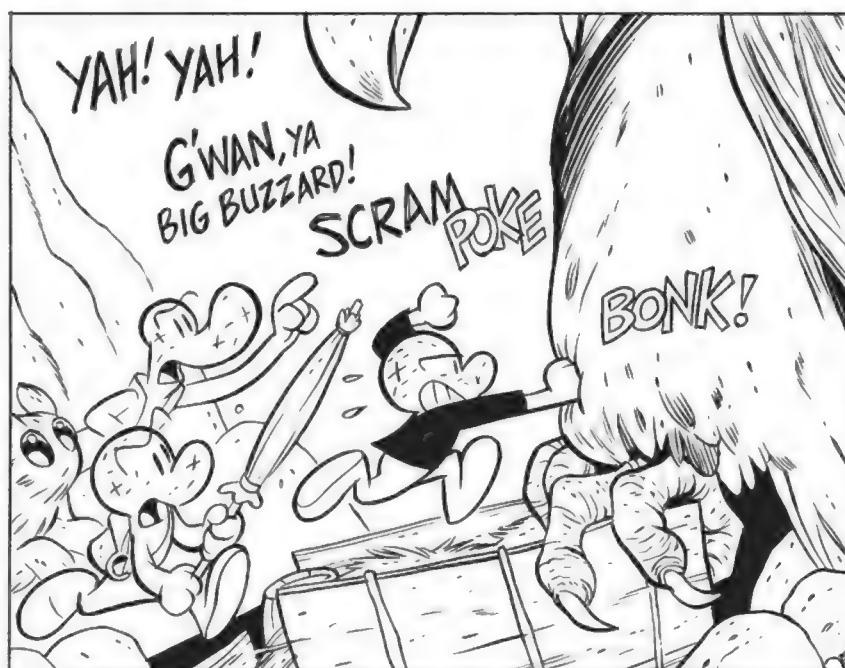


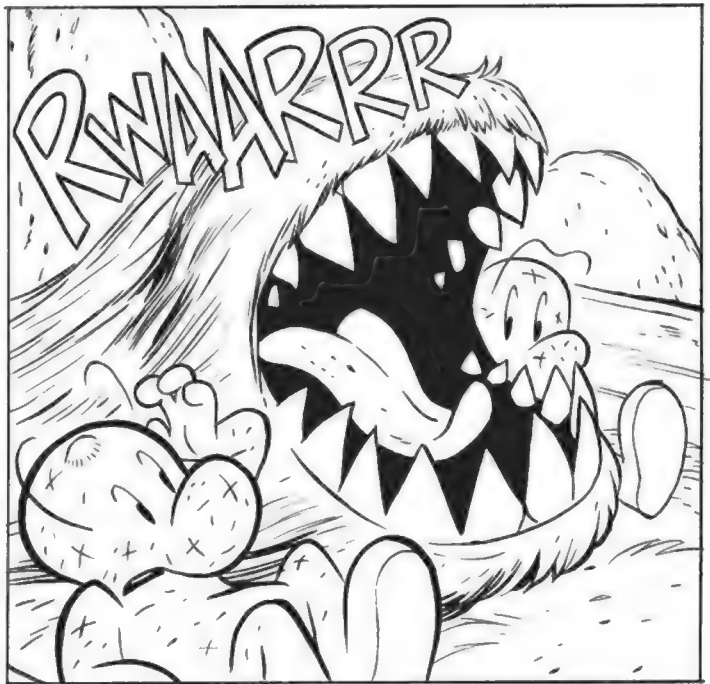
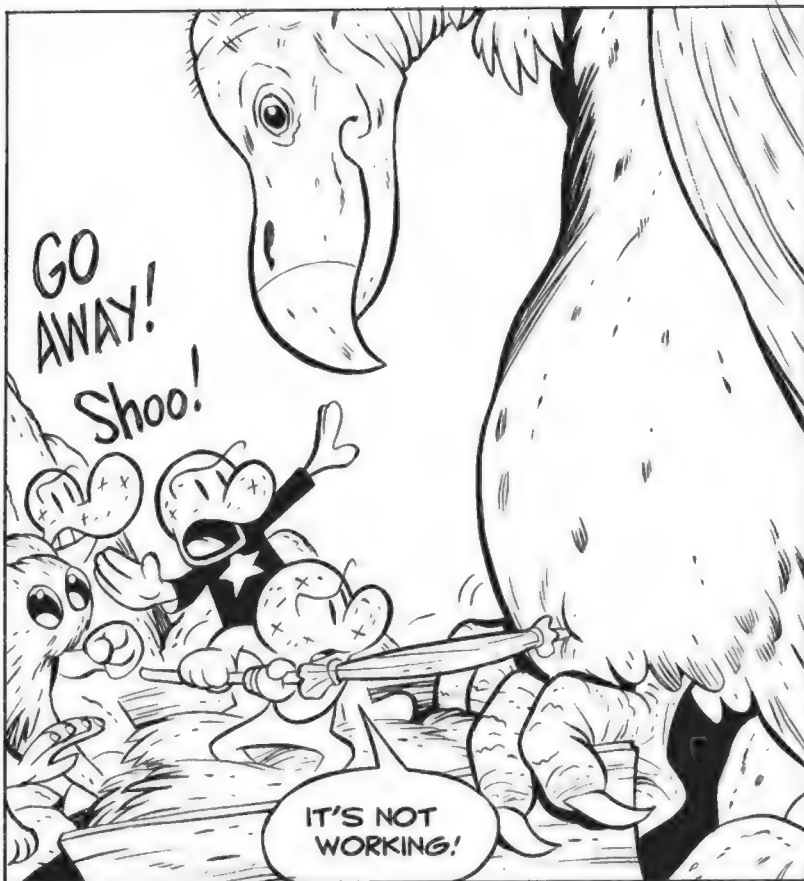


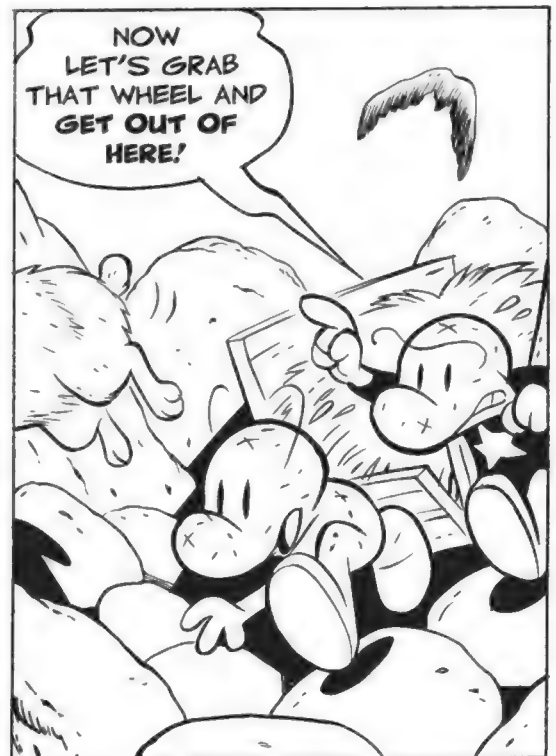




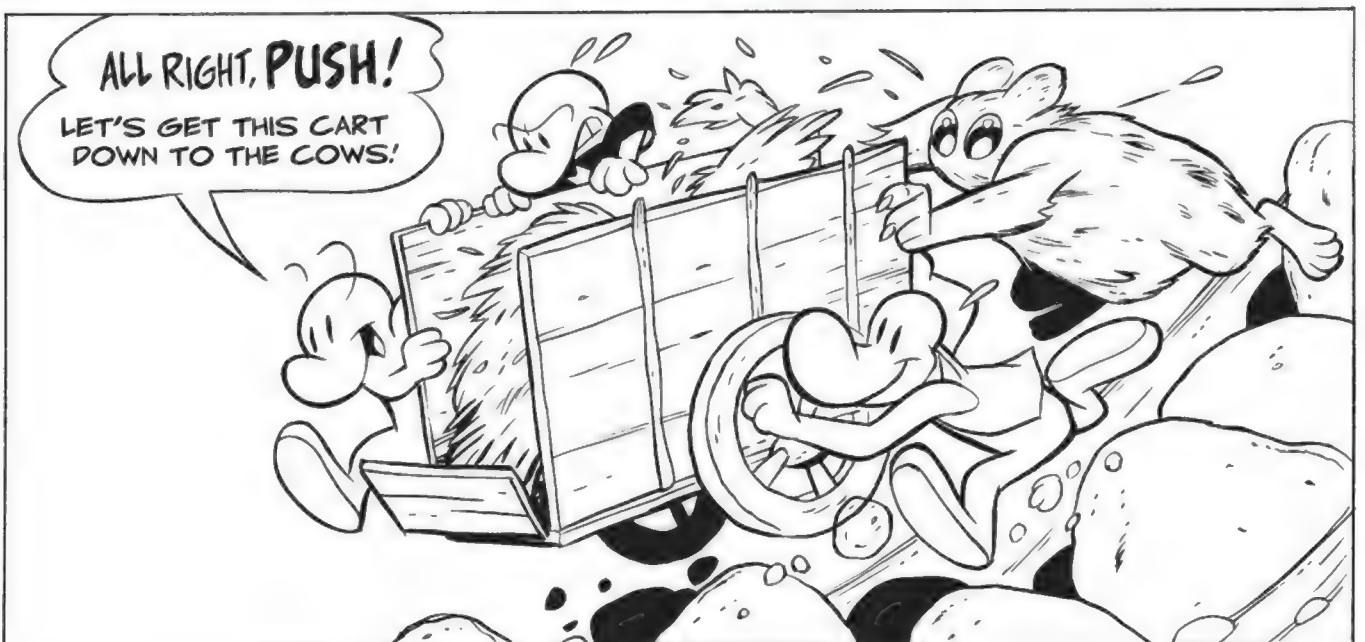
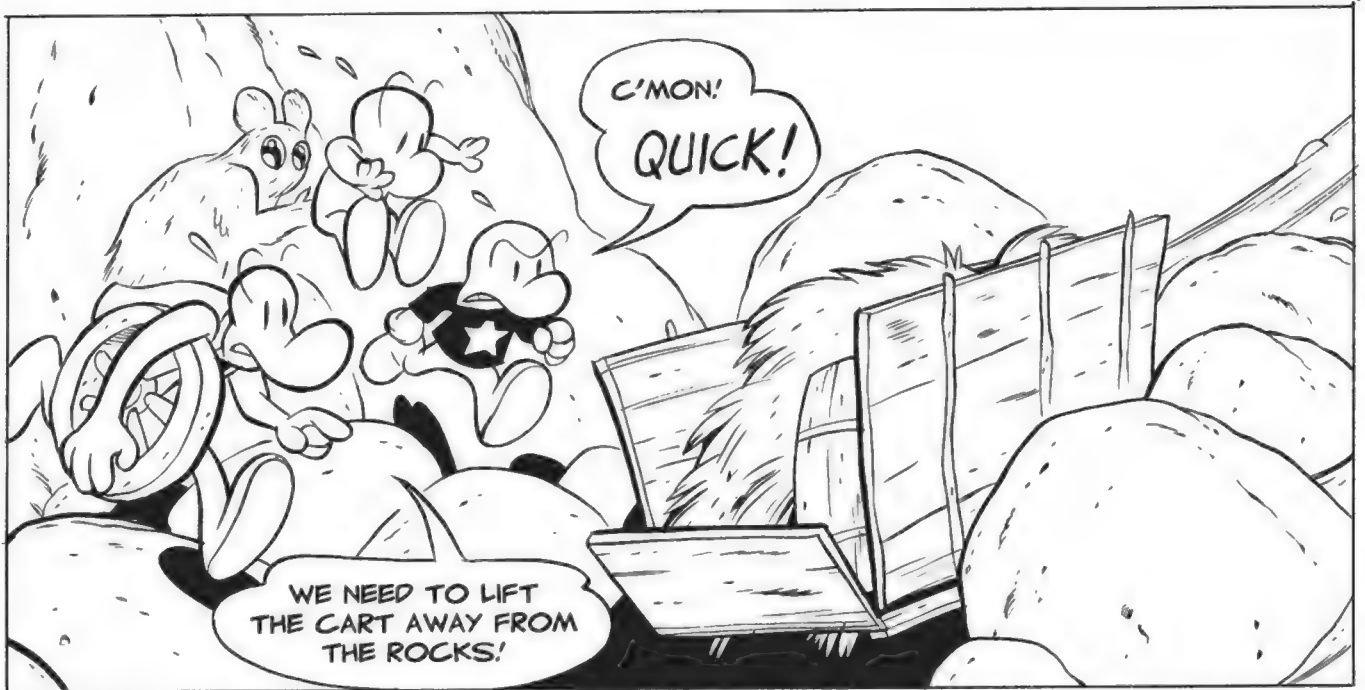




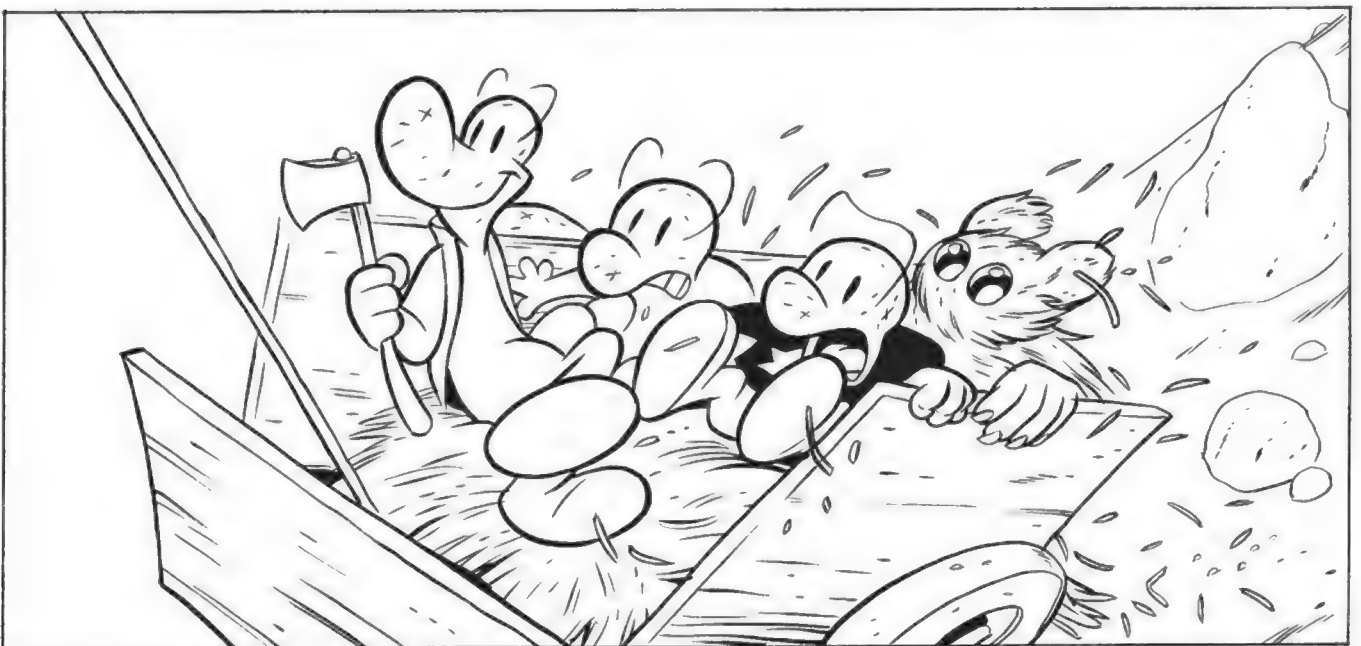
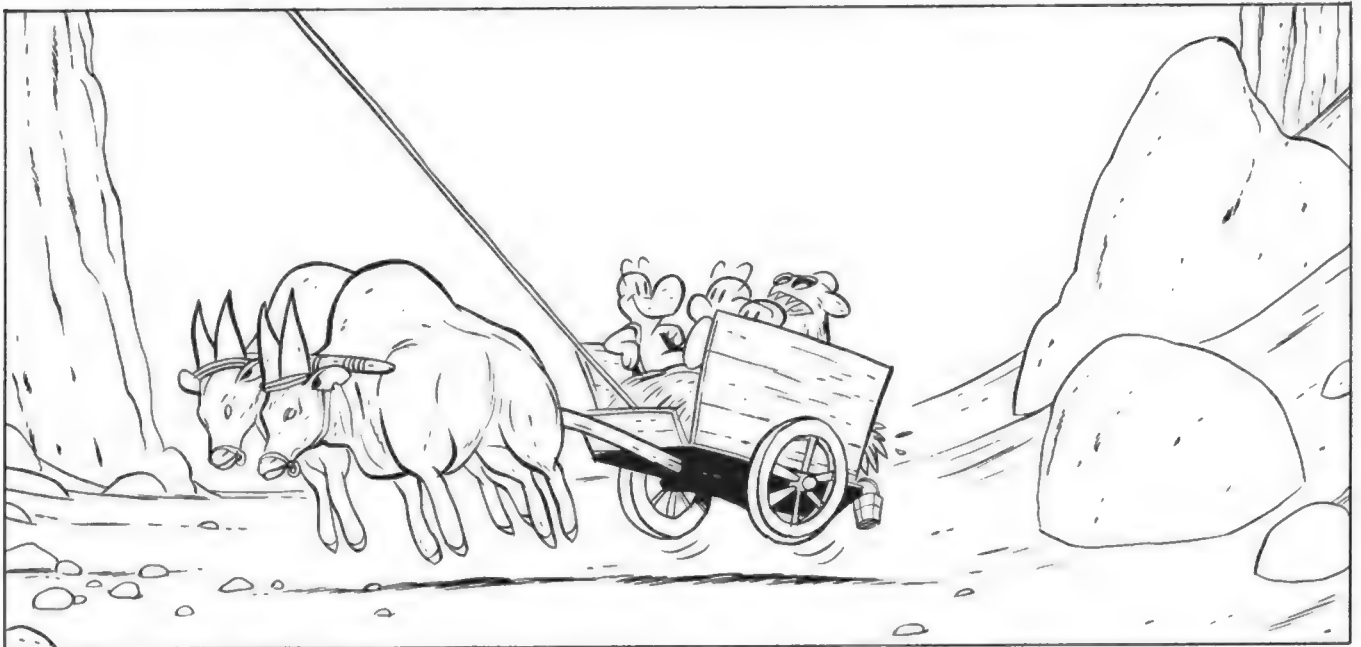
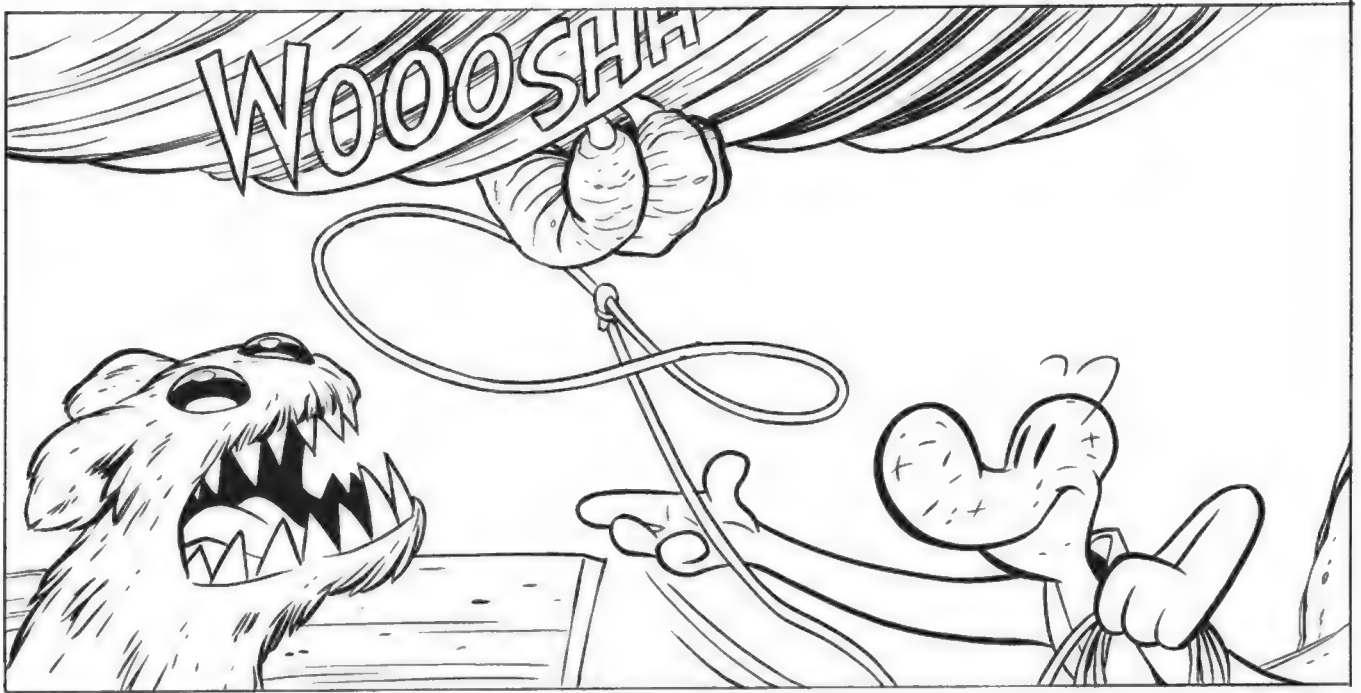


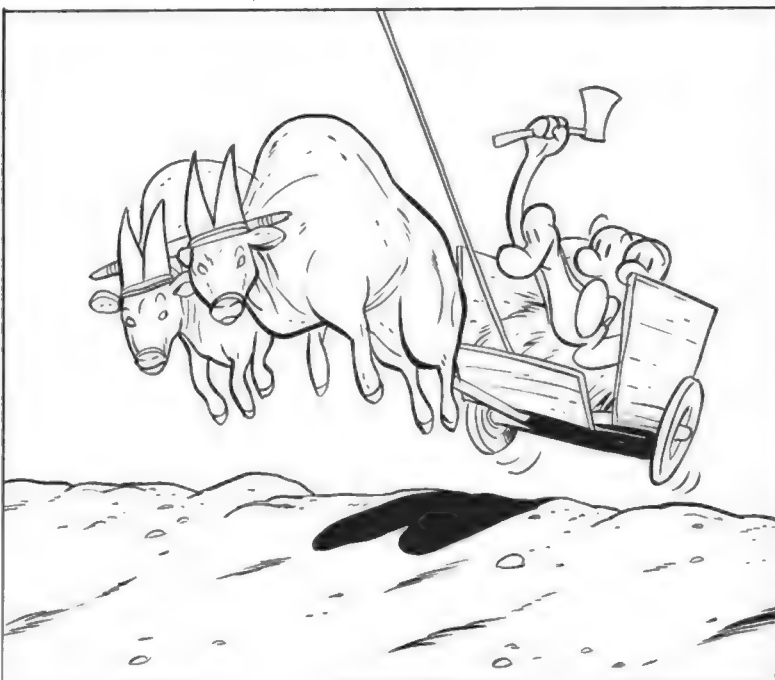
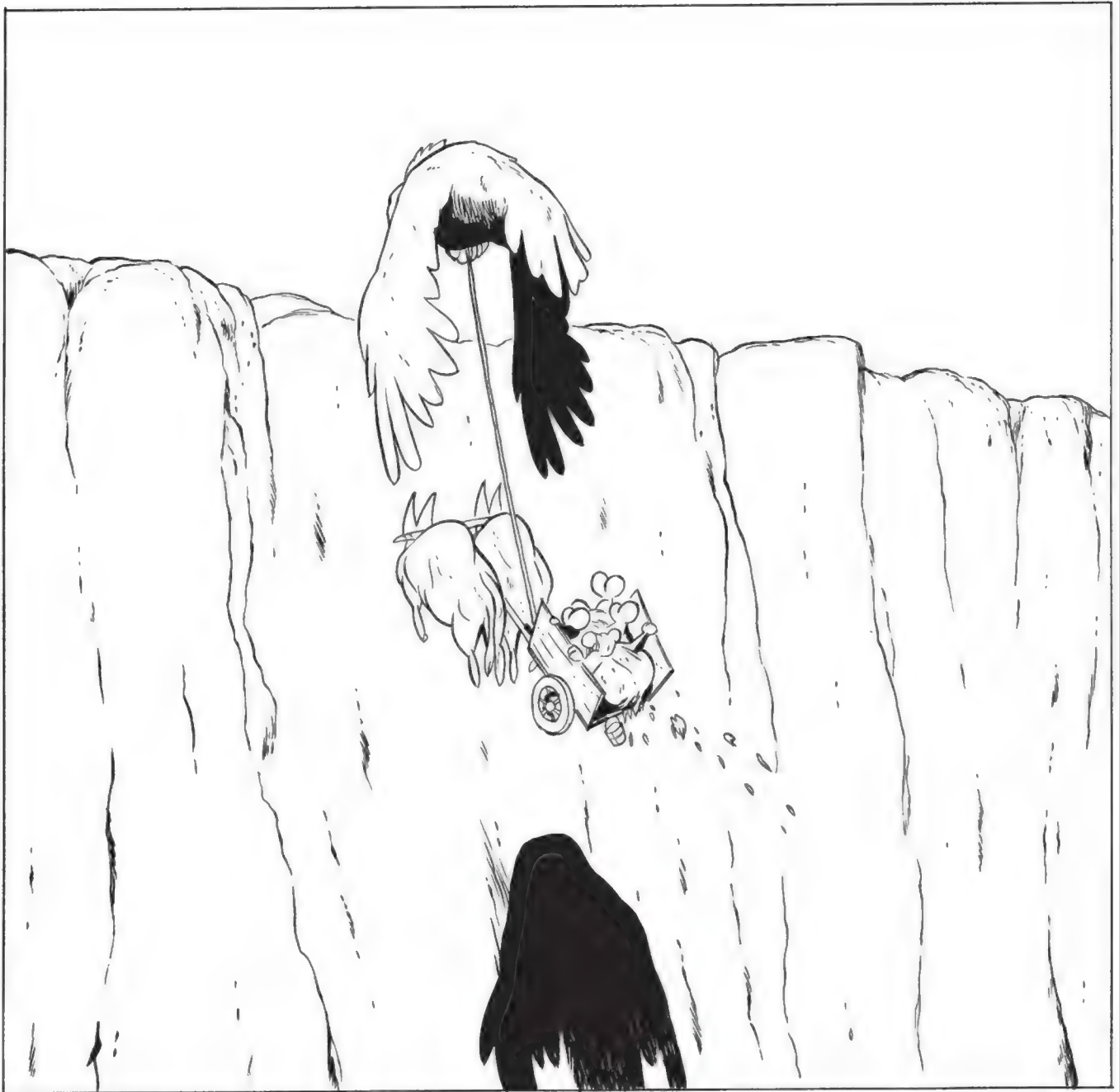


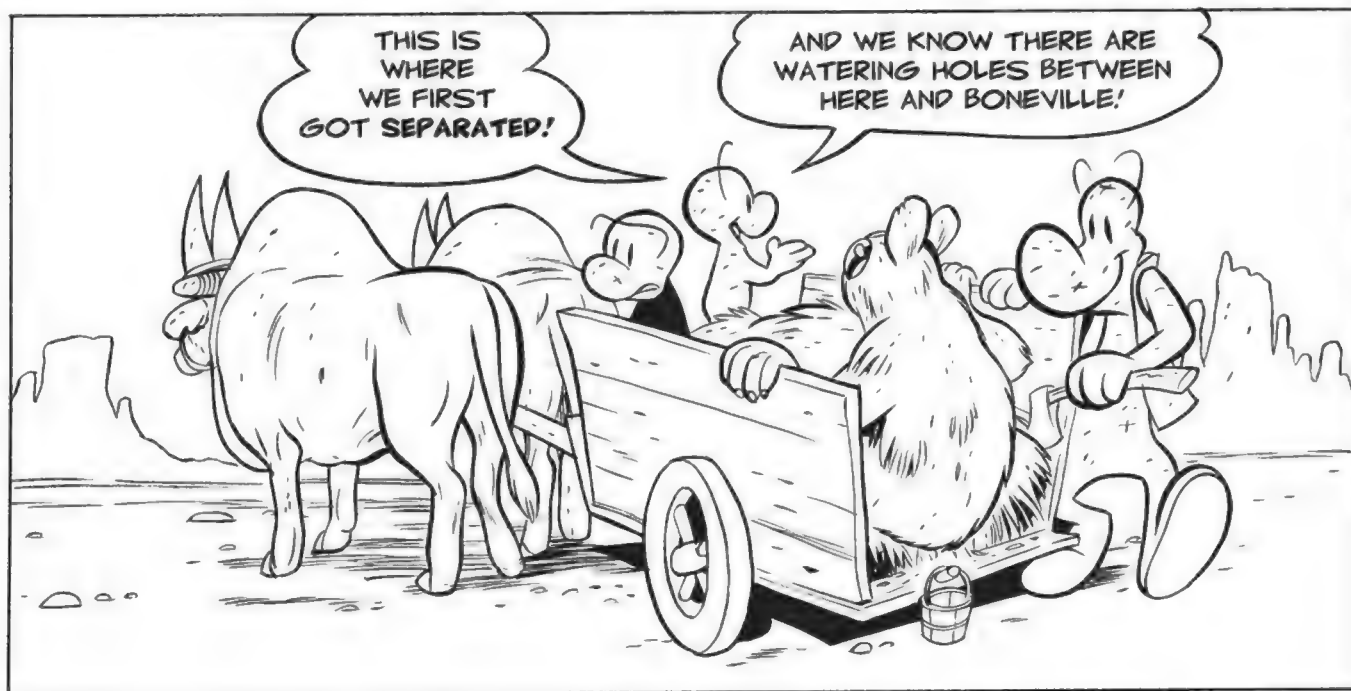
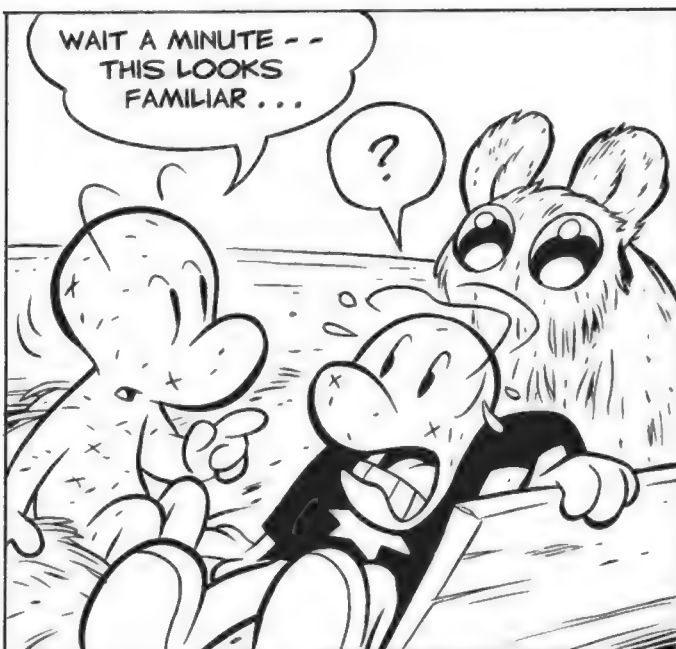


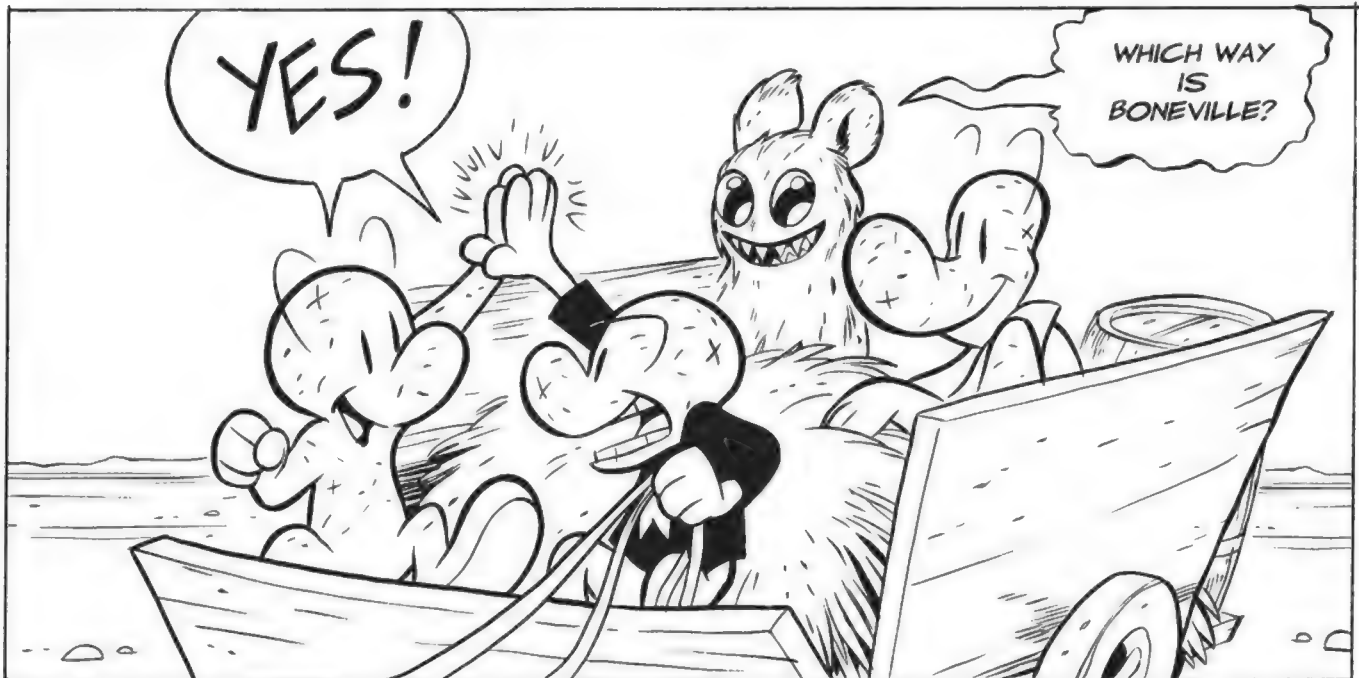




















Above: Artwork for our moving announcement sent to people in the comic book business when Vijaya and I moved to the San Francisco Bay area in 1992

Opposite: Promotional art for the 2000 Comic Book Legal Defense Fund's Making Waves cruise. The drawing spoofs the characters created by a few of the artists on board. L to R: Frank Miller's Marv from Sin City, Neil Gaiman's Sandman, Will Eisner's Spirit, and Evan Dorkin's Milk & Cheese



A Moveable Pizza Party

By Jeff Smith

25 years ago, when we launched *BONE*, the comic book industry was poised on the edge of a knife. Something was about to break. You could feel it. A few Marvel artists were selling individual issues in the millions starting with Todd McFarlane's *Spider-man* #1. A handful of successful indy comics like *Cerebus*, *Elfquest*, and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* were creating a new model of self-publishing. Neil Gaiman's *Sandman* was turning heads. At the same time a new magazine called *Wizard: The Guide to Comics* appeared. *Wizard*, with its price guide, interviews and profiles, glorified comics, comic collecting - - - and they treated creators like movie stars. It was slick, glossy and highly addictive.

The first issue of *Wizard* dropped in July 1991. Although very few people noticed it at the time, BONE #1 landed on store shelves the very same day.

When I jumped into the comic book game with a quirky, funny animal comic of sorts that was part throwback, part something no one had seen before -- I wasn't sure what would happen.

Sometimes you're in the right place at the right time.

It's weird remembering what it was like back then. Tumbling down that dark, tangled path back...back...before email or the internet; before blockbuster superhero movies or nightly TV coverage of big announcements coming out of Comic-Con; before SPX or A.P.E.; before in-depth comics podcasts and YouTube, was a time when there was no *New York Times Bestselling Graphic Novels List*, you couldn't pick up graphic novels in any bookstore or school library and you couldn't buy them on Amazon or ComiXology. Back then comic books could only be found in hobby shops.

The first time I went to a comic book store was almost an accident. I was looking for Frank Miller's *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* when I discovered an old-timey shop in Columbus called Monkey's Retreat. It was run by a fellow named Rosie, who looked like a biker, and he was passionate about comic books.

I picked up Miller's comic, but also made a big discovery. Among the magazines, tattoo books, porn,



underground paraphernalia, and old comic books in long boxes complete with a cat sleeping on top of them, were a bunch of current black & white comics by cartoonists who wrote and drew their own characters: *Love & Rockets* by the Hernandez Bros., *Cerebus* by Dave Sim and Gerhard, *Eightball* by Dan Clowes, and *Hate* by Peter Bagge. RAW was there, so was the newly released *MAUS* by Art Spiegelman. The talent on display was staggering. For my money, it was artistically on par with any past golden age of cartooning. I should say here that at the time I co-owned a relatively successful animation studio that was regularly getting juicy gigs from every Hollywood studio except Disney, and even they would hire us in the near future. Vijaya had a comfortable corporate job developing



Frank Miller's
variant cover for BONE #38



Drawing for Ohio State Alumni Magazine Circa 2000

software, but suddenly, the only thing I wanted was to give it all up and draw an underground comic book and be part of what looked to me like an exciting new scene.

Fortunately, Vijaya isn't quite as impulsive as I am, but she does love comics and cartoons, so together we came up with a plan. We would start a company called Cartoon Books and publish a black & white 24-page comic book every other month. This is from our 1990 business plan: "To keep readers interested so they will buy subsequent issues, BONE will be serialized. Each issue will present not only a self-contained sub-plot, but also a new clue or chapter to a much larger storyline that will be slowly revealed as all the forces in the plot come into play. To ensure that no one feels they are unable to catch up to the larger story, Cartoon Books will periodically publish compilations of past issues for new readers. Compilations, or "graphic novels", have a longer shelf-life than the regular bi-monthly issues and will play a large role in our efforts to maintain a presence in the marketplace."

In 1991, the established trade magazines were The Comics Journal and the Comics Buyer's Guide (CBG). The Journal, edited by Gary Groth and co-published by his partner Kim Thompson, covered comics in a very different way than Don and Maggie Thompson did at the CBG--but I loved them both and read every issue faithfully cover to cover



So, I like how graphic novels is in quotation marks. Anyway, I promised after six issues of BONE, if the book had no traction, I would give up and go back to animation. The first thing I did was to write the ending. Once I knew how the ending worked, I sat down at my kitchen table and started drawing the first page of BONE #1.

The first couple of years were nail-biters. The sales of BONE were low and dropping with each issue. Vijaya accepted a job with a software company in Silicon Valley, so we packed up and moved to California. I remember when we first got there, she would go to work in the morning, leaving me to finish up BONE #6 in our hotel. I would have to stop and go stand in the parking lot while housekeeping cleaned the room.

Then something amazing happened. I could sense BONE starting to connect with the comic book world. The two most important trade magazines, *The Comics Journal* and the *Comics Buyer's Guide*, that represented the poles of the art form, literate comics and traditional comics collecting respectively, both liked BONE and gave it good reviews. *Wizard*, who mostly dealt with Marvel and DC superheroes, also gave

BONE the thumbs up.

Neil Gaiman gave BONE a huge endorsement during an interview on a TV show out of Toronto called *Prisoners of Gravity* produced by Mark Askwith.



Panel from BONE prequel Rose (2002) painted by Charles Vess



With Frank Miller, Don Simpson, Colleen Doran, Larry Marder
at a Chicago comic book convention circa 1994

Mark not only introduced Neil to BONE, he put me in touch with one of my first and still best friends in comics, Charles Vess. Charles called me out of the blue and asked me if I was going to San Diego for Comic-Con, which was coming up in about a month.

No, I said, what's Comic-Con? He laughed and then made me an offer. Everyone goes to San Diego. If I showed up, he would let me use half of his table to sit behind.

San Diego Comic-Con, or Comic-Con International as it's now known, is where things really started to click. It was smaller than it is today, and it was possible to see and meet everyone in the comics field. Two quick early Comic-Con stories: Larry Marder, the cartoonist of *Beanworld*, dragged me over to meet Scott McCloud. Scott was set up behind a table with a huge stack of original art for an upcoming project. Word had been spreading across the floor that he was working on something cool, crazy, and different. I met Scott, and took a look at the pages as he explained them to me. I was immediately impressed. The original pages I was holding were the first two-thirds of *Understanding Comics*. I also remember there being more social events, including a dance where comic book readers and makers intermingled, dancing awkwardly. I tagged along to the mixer with Bob Burden, the creator of *Flaming Carrot*. As we stood on the side watching, Bob gave me the best advice I've ever received. Son, he said, don't ever let your fans see you dance.



Another big boost came when I met Heidi MacDonald and Marv Wolfman, the comic editors of *Disney Adventures*, at an industry event. They wanted to commission a brand new BONE story for the digest-sized magazine that sold in the millions at grocery store checkouts. After that, they then began a two-year run serializing the first BONE story arc. I can't tell you how many readers I meet who tell me it was there they first discovered the comic.



Jam drawing made to promote the self-published comics of
(L to R): Dave Sim, me, James Owen, Martin Wagner and Colleen Doran in 1993. This print effectively announced the new Self-Publishing Movement which swept the comic book industry in the mid 90s

I started getting letters from readers. I met Frank Miller at WonderCon in the Bay Area, where he gave me a pat on the back and some words of encouragement. I ran into Dave Sim at a trade show, and knew I'd found a fellow traveler, with whom I would soon solidify the Self-Publishing Movement. Even more important were the relationships I was building with comic shop owners. Many times I heard shop owners tell me they would give copies of BONE to customers and tell them to go home and read it, and only pay for it if they liked it. That's amazing, and I can only stand in awe of a community of people who love what they do and care about the products they sell that much. Whatever success I've achieved, I owe as much to comic shop owners and managers as to anything else.



Pizza Party! On the road somewhere, hanging out in Dave Sim's suite in the early 90s. L to R: Dave Sim, Me, Colleen Doran, Neil Gaiman, and James Owen. Photo courtesy of Colleen Doran

Soon it seemed like BONE was everywhere - - in trade articles about the direction of the industry - - it was dubbed the anti-gimmick comic, the poster child of the Self-Publishing Movement, the new direction, the new mainstream, and even the new all ages movement. I was often chided and dismissed as the new flavor of the month. It was cheers and jeers pretty equally for awhile there. Oh, well. What can you do? I didn't have any control of it.

Being part of the Self-Publishing Movement with fellow artists like Dave Sim, Colleen Doran, Martin Wagner, Rick Veitch, Eddie Campbell, Steve Bissette, Terry Moore, Paul Pope, Larry Marder and so many others, gave me a place to belong. A scene to be part of. And it was a scene. Even non-self publishers who were into creators' rights like Gaiman, McCloud, and Frank Miller were often on hand. Everywhere we went something was going on. We held parties for retailers, gatherings of other self-publishers, and always had massive signings. There was Bar Con, when we staged a signing in the hotel lounge after the organizers of a retailer event barred

us from signing on the showroom floor. Colleen Doran stills laughs about that one. We were stealing too much attention.

My main memories of the Self-Publishing Movement are: 1) the sheer excitement that was flying around about the idea of an artist controlling his or her own work, and 2) sitting around with other like-minded folks in a hotel room somewhere, usually Dave Sim's penthouse suite, talking about comics and how to improve the business model for selling them. Mainly the radical idea that we sell our comics the same way books are sold.

Back then, graphic novels were a rarity. Comic book shops only sold comics like magazines; that is, they were replaced every month by a new issue before being taken down and put into long boxes. These booklets were never to be reprinted or seen again, unless bought by collectors at market price. We wanted our work to stay in print and on the shelves.

We thought the answer was collecting our comics in graphic novels; a misunderstood format that most people in the industry viewed as an expensive luxury. We wanted to make them cheap, always available, and always in print. It was an idea whose time had come.

And it was especially important for BONE, because it was a single, long story, and readers needed an easily available way to get the early chapters.



The Complete BONE Adventures Volume One, 1993, reprinted issues 1-6 and was the first BONE graphic novel. The name was later changed to BONE Volume One: Out from Boneville



Jim Valentino, one of the co-founders of Image Comics, me, and Neil Gaiman. Photo courtesy of Colleen Doran

Someone who shared my focus on graphic novels was Gaiman. I remember having breakfast in one of the hotels when Neil came in carrying the mock-up for one of the first *Sandman* collections. Neil had a vision for his story and an end in mind, and you could see the excitement in his eyes. These collected editions were going to be important.

The industry change was in full swing.

The same Marvel hot-shots who were selling millions of copies set up their own company, Image Comics, and began rattling the cages of the business, blurring the line between artists and publishers. The inmates were in charge of the asylum. McCloud's *Understanding Comics* stuck a flag in the sand that claimed comics as an art form, and Chris Ware began *ACME Novelty Library*, pretty much proving it. Another shift taking place was the appearance of women and children at comic book conventions. There were always women reading comics, of course, but not many. Comic book shops and Cons were boys' clubs.

I never talked with Neil about this, but it was clear that *Sandman* and *BONE* played a part in this trend. Neil especially attracted female fans. My role seemed to be making the first comic that guys could get their girlfriends to read. It's true. I've heard it thousands of times straight from the girlfriends' mouths!

By this time, Vijaya had quit her job and become my full-time partner in Cartoon Books.

She'd always been my partner, but this was official; we were committing to *BONE* for the long haul. Soon orders were getting fulfilled, the supply chain in full swing, and Vijaya began licensing the books to foreign



Cody McKee and Sonia Bobula McKee have been stopping by the Cartoon Books booth for years now to get their books signed. Sonia was tricked into reading comics because of *BONE*. I've apologized many times since



publishers for print and merchandise. As of this writing, BONE has been translated into 26 languages.

This is not to say it was all unicorns and rainbows. This is a tough, fickle business, especially for independent operators. There was

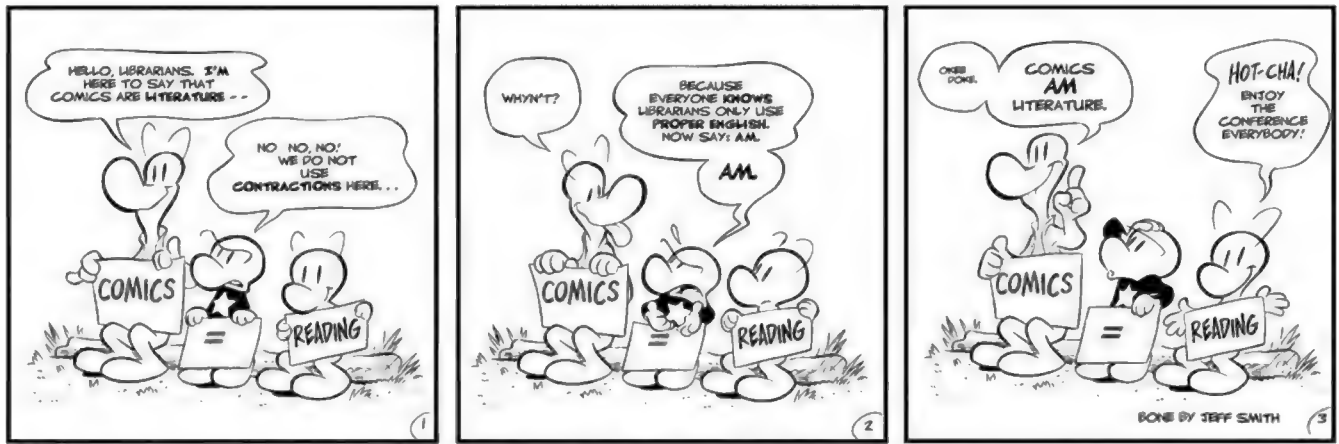
often trouble and opportunity in equal measure every time you turned around.

We had to think and act quickly. In most cases our instincts served us well, but once though, I thought we'd had it.

In the early 2000s, while trying to expand our company in a couple of directions, we put a lot of money into a line of BONE action figures. We underestimated how long the money would be tied up, and when a perfect storm of projects fell apart, including another author we were publishing who pulled out without warning, Vijaya and I suddenly found ourselves in real trouble. Some of the problems were beyond our control, but that fact is of no help when you are about to lose your company. We



had four full-time employees at the time, and one part-time. It was horrible, but we laid off all but one, and moved out of our offices and into my one room studio over the garage. All we could do was tighten our belts and wait it out. I distinctly remember one gloomy night sitting at my drawing board believing that it was over; I wasn't going to finish BONE.



In 2002, the ALA held its most successful pre-show event ever, called Get Graphic @ Your Library. I was asked to draw a little comic strip especially for the librarians

We were saved by the librarians. A piece of our graphic novel strategy was working without our even knowing it. Due to the sturdier nature of the collections, libraries were shelving the BONE books, along with a growing number of comic books, and in 2002, the American Library Association held a dedicated graphic novel day in conjunction with their annual conference. I was invited to speak to an audience of librarians along with Art Spiegelman, Neil Gaiman, Colleen Doran, and comics historian & librarian Stephen Weiner (whose independently published BONE Companion is included in this book). The event was a success, resulting in a general acceptance of graphic novels as literature, and for the first time, larger amounts of them appeared in libraries and schools across the nation. Librarians are my heroes. They recognized that comics are reading, could be literature, and not a jumble of empty eye candy for lazy people.





Meanwhile, a lovely gentleman named Jim Killen was slowly building a successful graphic novel section in the big-box chain Barnes & Noble, where he was the Science Fiction & Fantasy book buyer. Things were looking up for graphic novels! We were able to dig ourselves out of the hole and hire back our staff.

Through it all, I never grew tired of drawing BONE; just the opposite, really. Entering the world of BONE was a nearly Zen-like experience where the

real world went away, and I always emerged refreshed. The characters seemed alive at times, forcing the story off the path and into new territory. Smiley's feelings of affection for Bartleby were not only unplanned, but also somehow entirely genuine. One of the joys of creating the book as a serialized work was the reader feedback. For example, when Phoney and Smiley started working on a scam for the Great Cow Race, it was the readers' enthusiasm that pushed that storyline into prominence, creating one of the biggest showpieces of the series -- that ridiculous cow race was not in any of my original outlines. Thank you, readers!



I remember as the final act of BONE approached, I began to tell people that the whole thing was a single story, and the end was in sight. But it wasn't until Vijaya and I rolled into San Diego in 2004 for Comic-Con International with all 1344 pages of BONE in a great, honking paperback that the comic book community really grasped that it was a single story with a beginning, middle, and end. It was a bit of a gamble, because no

one knew if anyone would want a huge omnibus like this. Vijaya was worried, and so was I, because we brought pallets of these things and we were pretty sure we would be shipping a ton home after the show. Kathleen Glosan, who has worked with us for nearly 20 years as I write this, came up with a neat idea. She took the massive tomes and stacked them up in round towers. It looked cool and kind of impressive! Happily, they sold out on the second day. The BONE One Volume Edition is now in its 21st printing.



Kathleen Glosan

Kathleen has been Cartoon Books' production manager since 1997, and I couldn't find my head without her. Or my glasses, or my phone, or wallet, which I usually leave in her office. She was the staffer we kept on when things were going down the tubes. Kathleen keeps everyone on task and the projects scheduled, as well as helping Vijaya with the business of publishing and licensing. She is a great

proofreader and has saved my butt many times. Tom Gaadt has been with us for 16 years, 8 full-time, doing design & layout, running the Boneville.com store, and manning the Cartoon Books booth at shows. 2016 will be his 17th San Diego Comic-Con International, which to him is like Christmas. Tom works with me on design, layout, and color on my current project, TUKI. Steve Hamaker worked with us for over a decade, first designing and producing our action figures, but quickly becoming an invaluable member of the team. His color work on BONE played a big roll in its success in the children's book market, and his color on RASL is the best I've ever seen in an American graphic novel. Through all the ups and downs, the



This image was originally designed for the 2001 San Diego Comic Con Program Guide. In 2004, it returned as the first cover of the Bone One Volume Edition



Tom Gaadt with Vijaya, a pallet of books and me



Steve Hamaker

crazy travel schedules, the innumerable requests and side projects, not to mention the stress of running every issue of every comic right up to the screaming deadline, these folks had my back.

Shortly after the comic was completed, Scholastic Books called. They had been hearing about BONE from librarians and parents for years, who told them kids couldn't get enough of it. They wanted to use BONE to launch a new graphic novel imprint called Graphix. They had a plan for reprinting the books in color, shelving them with other children's books, not in the *Dungeon & Dragons* section, and they wanted me to go on a national book tour. The book was a hit, and my relationship with the folks there has become a

close one. Dick Robinson, Ellie Berger, David Saylor, Cassandra Pelham, and the rest of team Scholastic are like family.

Color was Art Spiegelman's idea. Art and his wife Françoise Mouly, the Art Director of *The New Yorker*, were in talks with Scholastic about editing a line of children's graphic novels, and while that didn't happen, Art did manage during that time to convince me that I should color BONE. I resisted at first. The irony for me is that Art's seminal graphic novel *MAUS*, winner of the Pulitzer Prize, and a chief



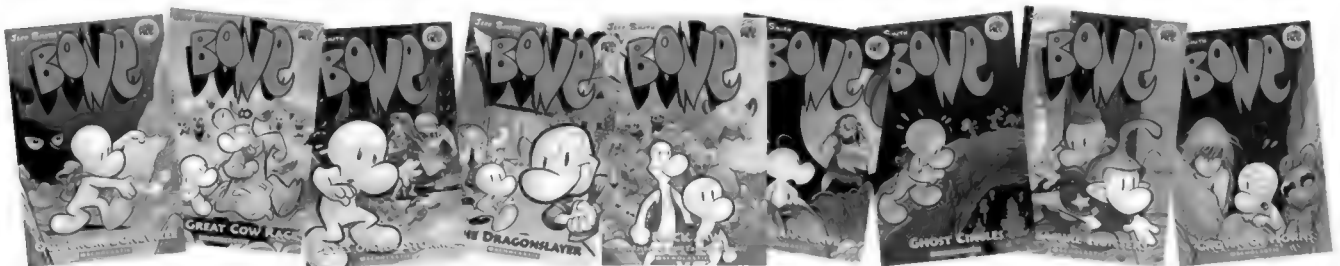
Me and Art Spiegelman autographing books at the CXC Comics Festival in Columbus, OH, 2015



The Brick. Now in its 21st Printing

inspiration for going forward with BONE, was in black & white. And besides, I worked hard to make the art look good in black & white. Why, I asked him, if MAUS is in black & white, should BONE be in color? His answer was: "MAUS is about war and the holocaust, it should be black & white. But BONE is about life, and it won't be finished until it's in color." So, yeah. It's in color. But I couldn't quite give up the black & white version, so Scholastic graciously agreed to let Vijaya and me continue to publish the black & white version of the One Volume Edition, or the

Brick, as it's come to be called, through Cartoon Books. Now, in a dream scenario come true, BONE is available in both the original black & white as well as the wildly popular color volumes from Scholastic/Graphix.



As you've probably gathered from this story so far, comic book shows are a big part of this job. When I'm not drawing a book, I'm on the road promoting one. We went to every comic book convention we could



drive or fly to, and as often as twice a year we were invited to visit European shows as guests. Comic book people are the same everywhere, and we have fabulous partners all over the world. BONE is published in over 26 languages. What a pleasure it is to visit a country and be taken out to dinner by your host! We've experienced the world's culture and cuisines in such a privileged way, and have comic books and their fans to thank.



We still see and stay in contact with many of our friends here at home and overseas. Lets all take a moment and have a montage...



Stan Sakai (Usagi Yojimbo) and Kazu Kibuishi (Amulet) in Seattle 2014



Above: With Jules Feiffer (Kill my Mother) in 2010 at the National Book Festival on the National Mall in Washington DC

Below: Karen O'Connell and Patrick McDonnell (Mutts) at the black tie National Cartoonist Society Reuben Awards dinner in Pittsburgh 2013



Above: Me and Kyle Baker (Why I hate Saturn) at the National Book Festival Library of Congress 2014



Right: Frank Miller, Larry Marder (Beanworld), Colleen Doran (A Distant Soil) hanging out at the CBLDF launch party for RASL in 2008





Above: With Scott McCloud (The Sculptor) and Bryan Talbot (Dotter of Her Father's Eyes) at The Lakes International Comic Art Festival in England 2015

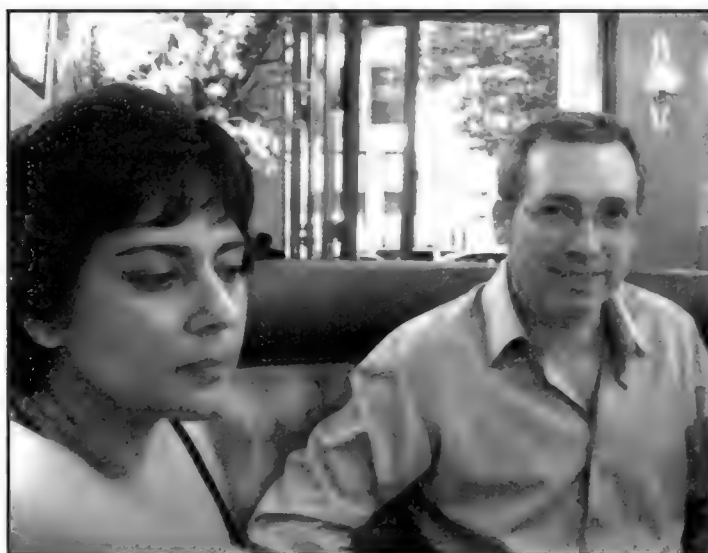
Right: Goin to Graceland with Bob and Gina Chapman (Graphitti Designs), Terry and Robyn Moore (Rachel Rising) and Vijaya

Bottom Left: David Saylor, Scholastic Vice President, Creative Director of Trade Publishing and Editorial Director of Graphix has too many titles. But he's one of our best friends, and here he is with Kathleen Glosan at the San Diego Scholastic Party

Bottom Right: Vijaya and our French Publisher Guy Delcourt (Editions Delcourt) enjoying lunch in an open air cafe



Cassandra Pelham, my Editor at Scholastic/Graphix



As time went on, I got to know a lot of the readers and fans all over the globe, because they would come to get their books signed year after year. I'm incredibly grateful to those readers for their loyalty and patience as they waited twelve years to find out how the story ended. So long, in fact, they got married and had families.

Now, thanks to Scholastic, it's their kids who are the main readers of this improbable little tale, and it seems like there are more of them every day. God bless 'em.



So thank you everyone, from Vijaya and me both, for taking this little trip down memory lane. And from the bottom of my heart, thank you all for letting me be a cartoonist.

Jeff Smith
Key West, Spring Equinox, 2016





Charles Vess and me in Key West
where the road runs out. Pals to the end

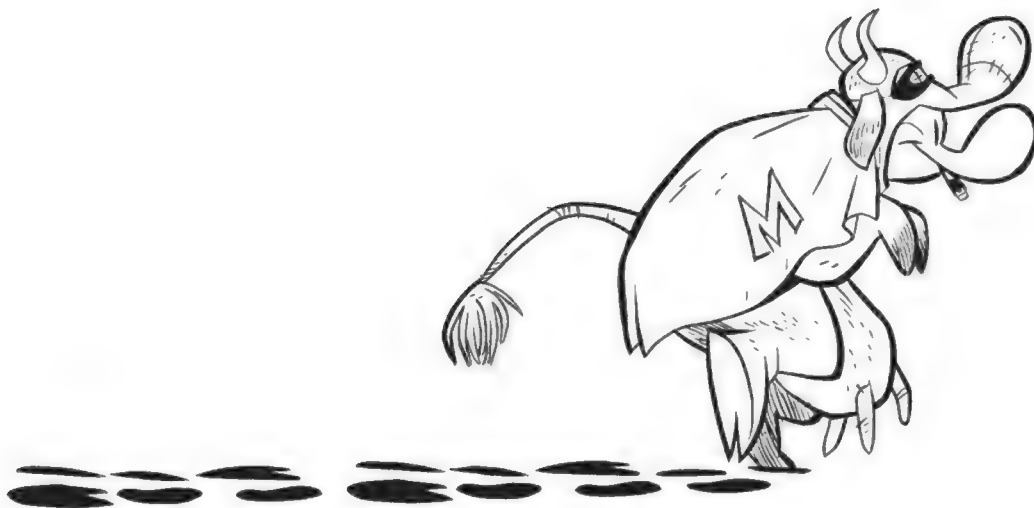
PART TWO

A BONE Companion by Stephen Weiner



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“Art gets me
through.”

--Maurice Sendak in conversation with Bill Moyers



BONE: A Book for Now!

Once in a generation, a work of fantasy comes along that changes everything in the field. Works like these alter not just the literary aspects of the field, but the way that readers experience fantasy, the way the world perceives great fantasy, and even the way fantasy is published. It is a widely accepted fact that J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954) resulted in this type of change. J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* (1997) books made a similar change, but perhaps the world has not generally appreciated the far-reaching nature of that change. Jeff Smith's *BONE* (1991) also changed fantasy in comic art, certainly just as deeply as the other great works of fantasy have, and in ways that are unexpected, not yet fully appreciated, and still unfolding in publishing, while also offering a generational appreciation for great fantasy epics.

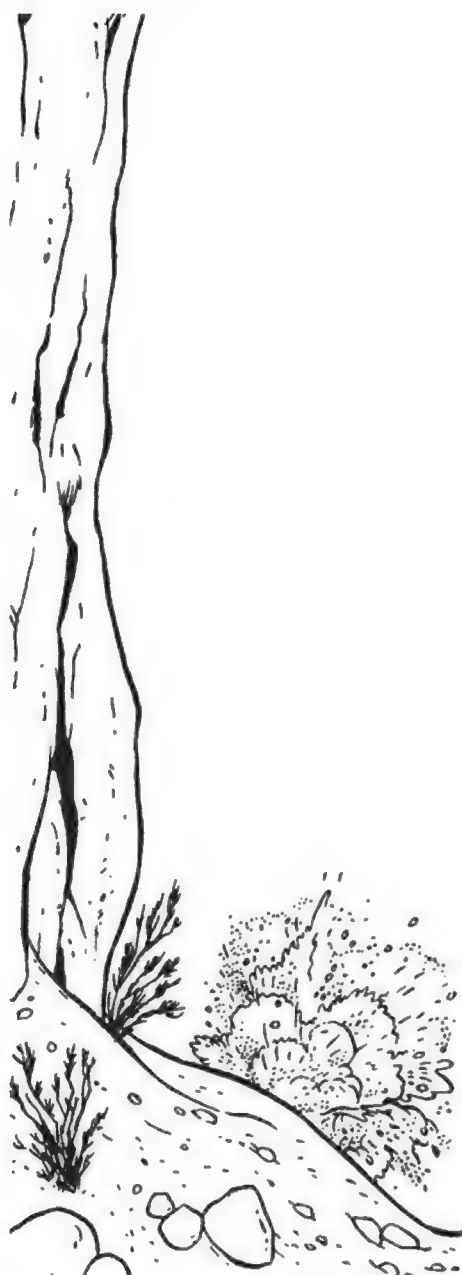


The Lord of the Rings was published by a relatively small British publisher, George Allen and Unwin, Ltd. The publisher expected to lose money on the books; however, editors were told to proceed with the project because of the outstanding nature of the material. Mr. Unwin believed it was worthwhile to lose money to publish fine and important works. No one expected that transatlantic success would spark a fantasy boom that continues to this day. But the changes go beyond just sales, dollars and numbers. *The Lord of the Rings* marked an advance in the quality, reach and sources of fantasy. Like other great works of literature, it summed up what had gone before, from medieval romances to Lord Dunsany's *King of Elfland's Daughter*, and moved the field ahead with its literary quality and psychological insights. And, it changed the readership of fantasy -- generationally, demographically, and indeed, in every way possible. The success of *The Lord of the Rings* also changed the way fantasy is published, particularly extending it into new formats, from mass-market paperbacks to lavish illustrated editions.

BONE has changed fantasy and the way it's published in comic format as well. It is a unique journey in that BONE has changed comic book publishing several times, in several different historical contexts. When Jeff Smith and Vijaya Iyer began self-publishing BONE comics in the 1990s, they contributed markedly to the new movement in independent comics that supported a whole new set of ideals related to creator control, rights ownership and willingness to directly address the comic's audience through convention appearances and well-made graphic novels. At a time when self-publishing was dominated by autobiography, pendants to superhero comics (like the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*) or Underground-Comix-



inflected autobiographical works, BONE embodied the comics' great fantasy, allegory and animal story traditions, working at the very highest level of this utterly crucial area of the field. Without Barks' *Donald Duck*, Kelly's *Pogo* and even the insightful strips and cartoons of Frederick Burr Opper and Heinrich Kley, comics would be far poorer and less resonant. Jeff Smith's BONE was imbued with these traditions from the beginning, carving out in independent comics a place for metaphorical and socially resonant, but also adventurous and totally engaging, comics built on the work of his predecessors. The early embrace of BONE by Don and Maggie Thompson, editors of the *Comics Buyer's Guide*, and the founders of Walt Kelly studies with their fanzine, *Newfangles*, testified to its quality and helped ensure its embrace by comics.

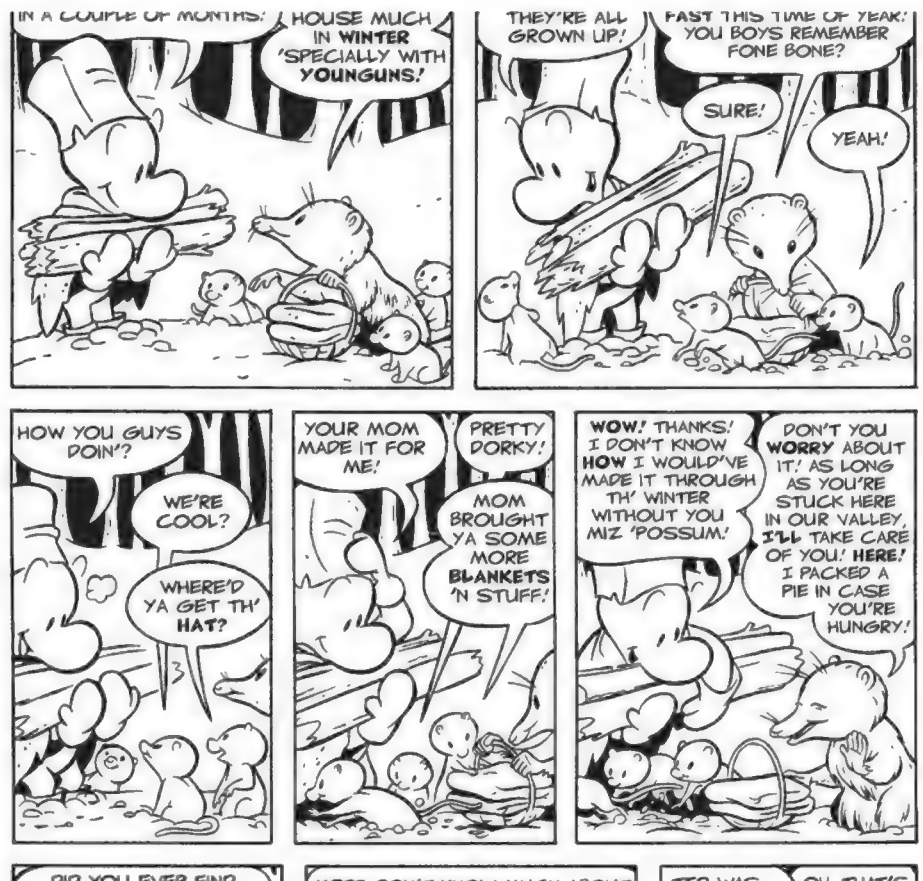


When the first *Harry Potter* book was published in England to low expectations, just like *The Fellowship of the Ring*, readers embraced it, not as the result of a strong marketing campaign, but rather because of good reviews and especially word of mouth. Like Tolkien, Rowling had taken the strengths of the fantasy genre and extended them in ways that were socially aware and grew more psychologically complex as the series progressed. Rowling enlivened the genre by combining in it elements of other works, like the British schoolboy novel, and the long series arc gave her room to incorporate a variety of genre strengths, while drawing on various sources. Like *The Lord of the Rings* and BONE, *Harry Potter* changed the way fantasy books were published. If *The Lord of the Rings* brought mass-market paperbacks to the forefront, *Harry Potter* brought the prestige of hardcover publication to young adult fantasy, changing fantasy terms and readership to extend broadly across all age groups and demographics.

The Hunger Games, as one example, stands in the path mapped out by *Harry Potter*.

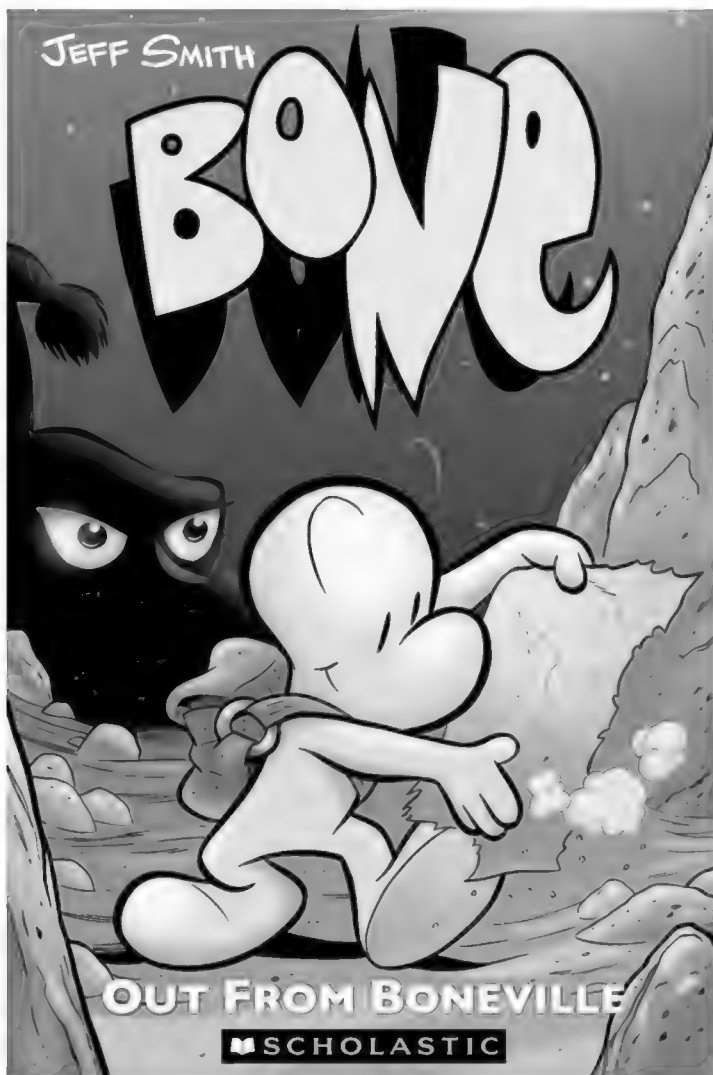
BONE changed fantasy in comics in a similar way. Like Rowling, Smith took on the challenge of an extremely long and complex mythic narrative. This compass enabled him to move beyond the achievements of Barks and Kelly because he could create engaging, extended mythic and adventurous story lines. Like the *Potter* books, Smith had the compass to enlarge and deepen his character portraits. Like the best fantasy, and like Tolkien, Smith could tap into so many varieties of sources, the humor and character-based warmth of Barks and Stanley, as well as the archetypal but all-too-human characters of great medieval romances like *Queen Mab in the Tain*, or *The Knights of the Round Table*.

BONE changed comics publishing over and over again. Cartoon Books is the model of a successful independent comics publisher, adapting to the independent comics market of the 1990s, the huge sales and distribution changes of the 1990s, and the move into bookstores and Internet sales in the 21st century.



Whatever anyone may say about the acceptance of graphic novels in literary and publishing circles, it's clear to most of us who teach at the college level and work in publishing that there's much more smoke than fire. Some graphic novels have settled comfortably in mid-list

books-sales terrain; a few, from *Ghost World* to *Scott Pilgrim*, have been made into critically and sometimes commercially successful films. But the real change in graphic novels is going to have to be a generational change. I sometimes joke that graphic novels will find acceptance in the academic and scholarly worlds only when the last Baby Boomer has died. But a change is taking place. I see it in my classrooms. Undergraduates completely understand and accept the visual and narrative language, as well as the social and cultural importance of comics and graphic novels. BONE is a key contributor to that understanding and acceptance.



Smith and Iyer's decision to allow Scholastic Books to publish BONE to launch their Graphix line of graphic novels changed everything. Had it been any other property, it's not clear that the future acceptance of comics and graphic novels would have been so assured. Because BONE is everything you want a comic series to be, it is the perfect creation to occupy this cultural and publishing space. Like *The Lord of the Rings*, it is a fully engaging fantasy epic designed for intellectually and emotionally complex adults. Because, again like *The Lord of the Rings*, it can be read by readers of all ages, it secured the reputation of comics with rising

generations. BONE also took seriously the history of comics; reading BONE opens its audience to the multifaceted history of comics, to its beginnings in complex Sunday strips for multiple readers, to the works of the Golden Age of comic books and strips, to the world of reflective

independent publishing beginning in the 1980s. BONE readers can understand and deeply appreciate anything in the comics world.

So, in addition to applauding the BONE books themselves, cheers to those who help bring BONE to new audiences and those who help BONE's readers gain a wider and deeper appreciation for this remarkable series of books. Stephen Weiner has a long history of helping the world appreciate comics, from his many activities in the American Library Association, to his history of publishing books for librarians and the general public regarding comics and graphic novels, their history and aesthetics. It's time to bring his appreciation for BONE in all its many facets to a wider audience. Enjoy!

N. C. Christopher Couch
Northampton, MA, 2014

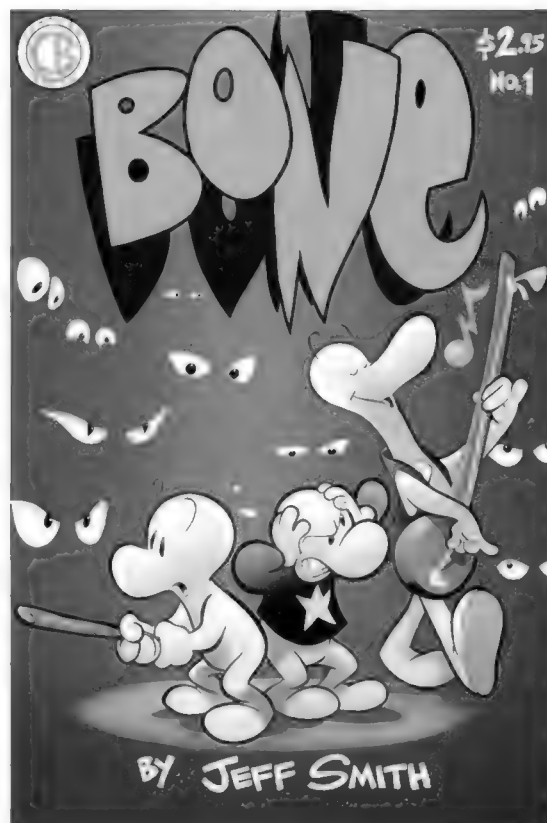




Introduction

It's been 12 years since Jeff Smith concluded his series BONE, which was first self-published as a black & white periodical from 1991-2004. These periodicals were collected to create a series of nine graphic novels from 1993-2004. Smith worked at his own pace, attempting to distribute an issue approximately every two months. He also took a year off to work with Nickelodeon Studios in the hope of bringing BONE to the big screen. Overall, BONE was completed in 55 issues, which were collected into nine books. Along the way, Smith picked up 41 national and international cartooning awards. When Cartoon Books, Smith's own publishing company, bound all nine books together and published BONE: The Complete Cartoon Epic in One Volume (also called the "One Volume Edition") in 2004, the BONE voyage seemed complete.

In a way it was just beginning. Graphic novels had been shouting out to trade book readers for about a decade, since Cartoon Books and other comic book publishers embraced the "graphic novel" format, which bound comic book stories between two covers and resembled trade books. Trade publishers followed suit. In 2005, Scholastic Books came to an agreement



The first and last issues of the comic book BONE. BONE #1, July 1991 and BONE #55, June 2004

with Cartoon Books to distribute a colorized version of BONE to the trade, school and library markets.

The effect was phenomenal. Where the black & white BONE had sold several hundred thousand copies within the comic book marketplace, the colored edition of BONE went worldwide and sold millions.

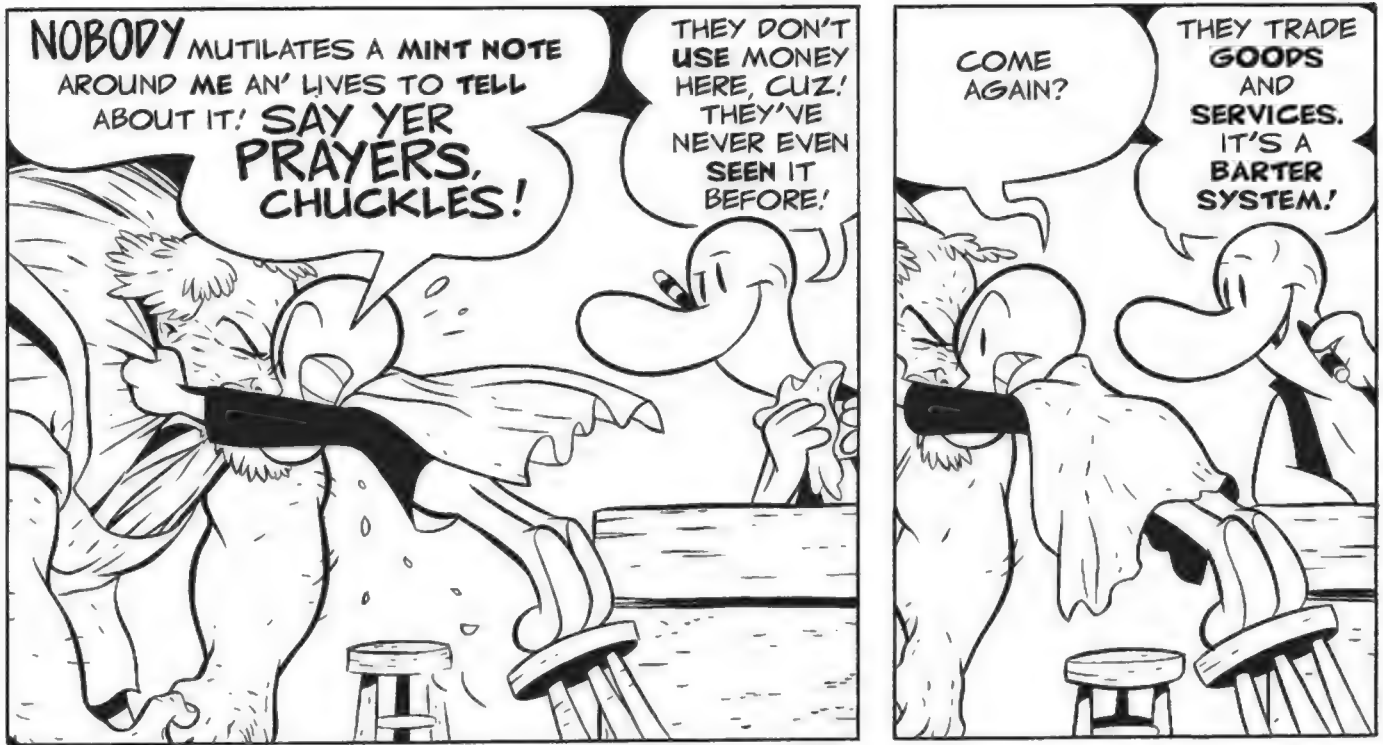
BONE has also proved to be surprisingly flexible and has been developed into a video game and two prequels. Scholastic Books published three follow-up, spinoff prose BONE novels written by Tom Sniegowski and illustrated by Smith, and a BONE feature-length movie is currently in development.

While it is easy to look at BONE solely as an artistic and storytelling achievement, BONE's success was as much a result of Smith and Vijaya Iyer's relentless attempts to help BONE reach new readers, so it's also instructive and interesting to note the careful steps Cartoon Books took to continually introduce new readers to BONE.

On the following pages I've tried to write a comprehensive essay covering some of the facets that made BONE such an important book for me (and I trust for others), as well as being such an important book in the evolution of the graphic novel form. When referring to events or panels in the BONE story, I've used the BONE: One Volume Edition (paperback). Most often, I will refer to the story generally, assuming that anyone reading this piece has already read BONE, so readers may want to have the BONE books handy as they use this book.

I have also tried to identify some of the important components that went into the making of BONE, as well as many of the cultural influences and the publishing environment which fostered its creation. I have also included an interview with Smith, conducted on October 19, 2013.





BONE: An Appreciation

Sales numbers alone demonstrate the success of BONE, but what is its appeal? The story roughly follows a fairly traditional hero tale, but it also deviates in important ways. The Bone cousins, outcasts from their own city of Boneville, land in a pre-technological valley locked in a battle for control of the kingdom. The Bones get involved in the war and help the royal family regain control of the Valley.

One of the things that makes BONE stand out as a hero tale is the absurdity of the Bone cousins themselves: They're not human, and yet they don't seem to be animals either. They seem to be adults but we're not quite sure. They're animated cartoon characters meaningfully interacting with humans. Smith achieves this feat in part by giving the three Bone cousins distinct personalities and very human personality traits. Fone Bone is well intentioned and moral but always loyal to



his cousins no matter what they've done. Phoney Bone is scheming and greedy but always looking out for his cousins, as well. Smiley Bone is simple minded, compassionate, gullible and willing to participate in any plan without considering outcomes.

By giving the Bones real character traits, Smith was able to humanize them, making credible their interactions with farmers, royalty and bar owners. The Bones could be real because their responses and actions were real despite their absurd appearance. This fact encapsulates perhaps the strongest single aspect of BONE; that although the Bone cousins are cartoon characters interacting with humans, readers identify more with the Bones than with the human characters.

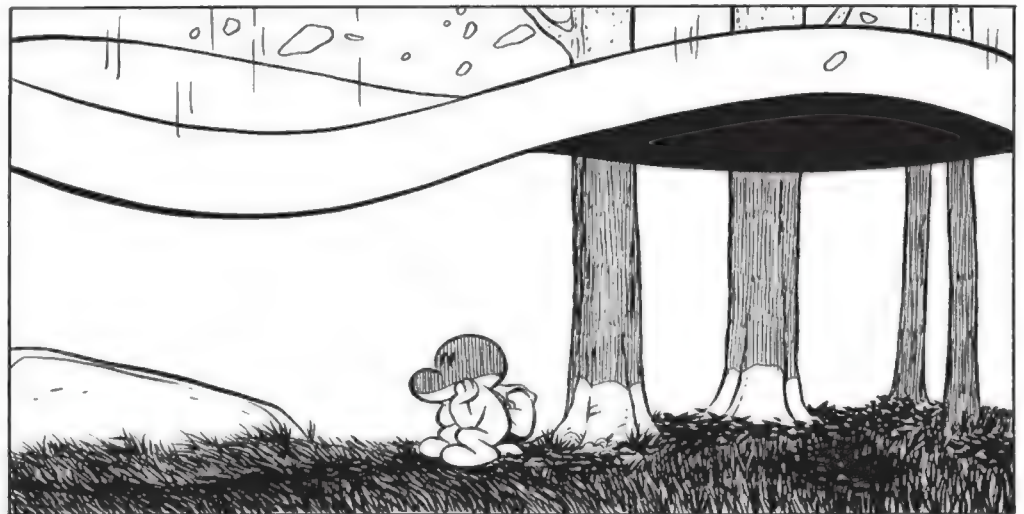
One can look at BONE in many ways: as a comedy, as an epic adventure and as a love story. It is, in turns, all of the above. The Bone cousins often act as slapstick-like characters in response to the dramatic elements of the story, and slapstick gags can be found in the first three books. The story structure mirrors an epic quest as Fone Bone and Thorn search out the "Crown of Horns," which unleashes the power of good. BONE invokes romantic elements as the relationship between Fone Bone and Thorn embodies many components of a romance. BONE is simultaneously a comedy, an epic and a romance. The mix of these classic forms is the basis for the book's great depth.

BONE is a cartoon. One of the advantages of the cartoon format is that it's very accessible. Another aspect is that it often relies on immediate visual recognition, allowing readers to make instant judgments. The Bones are rendered in a style similar to a Warner Bros. animated



cartoon, while the rest of the characters, the backgrounds and the objects are depicted realistically. This realistic content gives the Bone characters and the storyline itself a credibility that would be absent if the entire story were depicted as an animated cartoon.

As a cartoonist, Smith is able to visualize and depict multiple situations, environments and emotional responses. He can be purely comical, as he is when Fone Bone finds himself buried in an instant snowstorm (*Out from Boneville*, "Thorn", p. 38); dramatic, as in Thorn's dream (*The Great Cow Race*, "The Cave", p. 181); active, as when Thorn and Fone Bone fight off Rat Creatures (*Out from Boneville*, "Barrelhaven", p. 113); or angry, as when Lucius confronts Smiley (*The Great Cow Race*, "Up on the Roof", p. 262).



WHUMP!

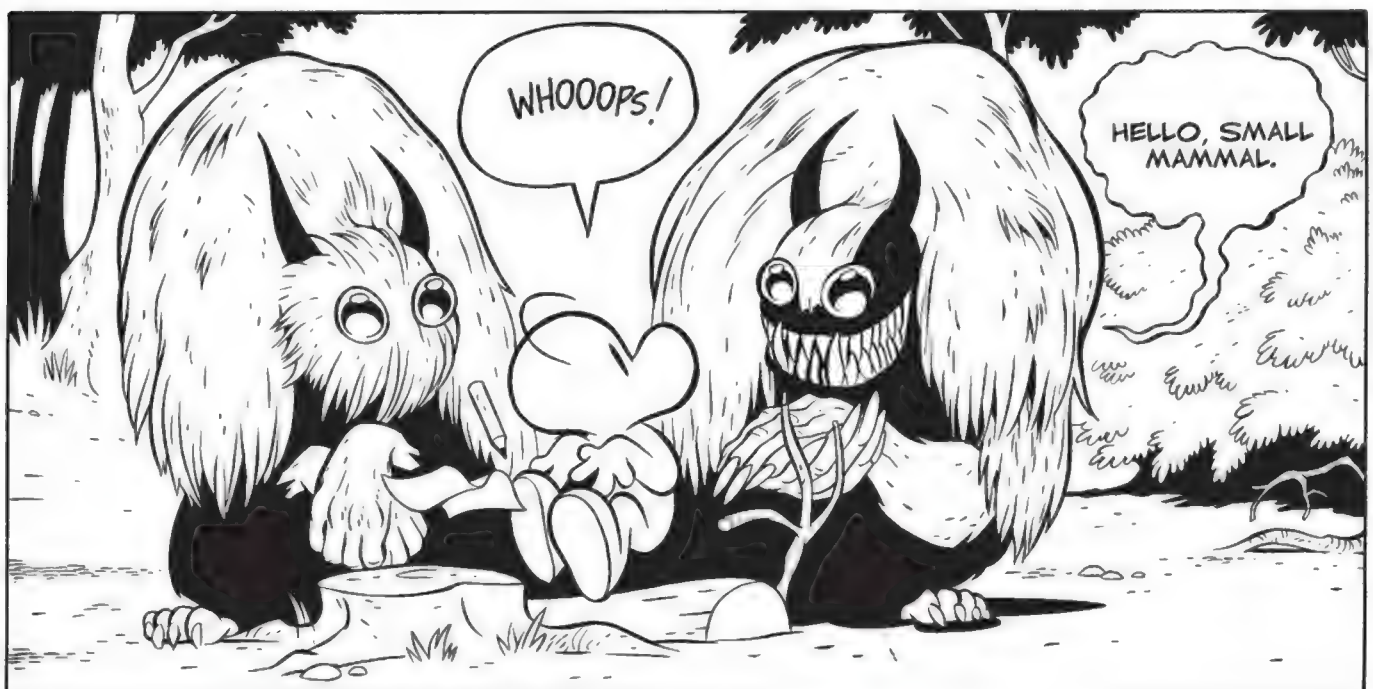
Smith can also switch gears within the space of one panel. One example is evident when Lucius, Smiley and Phoney Bone are surprised by Rat Creatures (*Eyes of the Storm*, "Road Trip", p. 323) and the actions evolve from silliness to fear in the same panel. Smith can also display fear, such as Fone Bone's response (*Ghost Circles*, "The Root Cellar", p. 958). He is very adept in portraying subtler emotions such as intimacy (Thorn and Fone Bone, *The Great Cow Race*, "The Cave", p. 193) and compassion (Lucius and Thorn, *The Dragonslayer*, "Deliver Us These Laws", p. 536). Infatuation and pure bliss are in Smith's cartooning arsenal (Fone Bone's infatuation with Thorn, *Eyes of the Storm*, "Moby Bone", p. 300), as well as Smiley and Bartleby celebrating their friendship (*Treasure Hunters*, "Pals", p. 1038). Finally, Smith is able to depict desperation, such as Thorn confiding

her hopelessness to Fone Bone (*Crown of Horns*, "The Dungeon & the Parapet", p. 1139); regret (Smiley realizing he may leave Bartleby behind, *Treasure Hunters*, "Moonwort", p. 1072); frustration (Phoney trying to get information from Ted the Bug, *Out from Boneville*, "Phoney Bone", p. 75); and wonder (Fone Bone flying, *Crown of Horns*, "Chamber of Horns", p. 1278).

The backgrounds vary from a simple black, such as when Red Dragon confronts Rat Creatures (*Out from Boneville*, "Barrelhaven", p. 126), to descriptive (*Out from Boneville*, "Phoney's Inferno", p. 145), to majestic (*Rock Jaw: Master of the Eastern Border*, "Roque Ja", p. 610).

Moreover, Smith can create situations that are funny in content as well as in execution, such as Ted the Bug helping Smiley pull Fone Bone out of a hole (*Old Man's Cave*, "Cranky Ground Hog", p. 726).

Another aspect that makes the book humorous is Smith's overall page design. By making the inept Rat Creatures much bigger than the Bone cousins, he works against type. A visual joke arises as it becomes clear that the Bones are unafraid of the Rat Creatures. The humor is dependent, primarily, on the contrasting size between the Bones and the Rat Creatures.



Smith's sense of drama is instinctive. In some cases this fact is illustrated by things not depicted, as well by illustrations themselves. Smith's ability to indicate, rather than show, action is one of the book's strengths. A good example of this technique is Fone Bone's off-stage disappearance in the last panel of Chapter 3 of *The Great Cow Race*, "The Mystery Cow", p. 216.

One of the strongest qualities of Smith's cartooning is the response the secondary characters in each panel give to each other, rather than to the reader. The main action or focus of an individual panel is often deepened by the secondary characters' responses. Each secondary character is awarded his own individual response. This approach gives the reader a fuller sense of the characters and a richer story. One good example takes place in the story "The Hollow Tree." In the same panel we see Thorn being angry, Jonathan frightened, Wendell forceful and Phoney Bone scared (*Old Man's Cave*, "The Hollow Tree", p. 742). In contrast, Smith is adept at presenting a unifying emotion, such as the empathy and compassion that Lucius and the Bones feel for Thorn when she is afraid after learning of her heritage (*The Dragonslayer*, "Deliver Us These Laws", p. 536).

Throughout the course of the series, Smith experimented with storytelling techniques. One issue was done in "real time" (*Eyes of the Storm*, "Eyes of the Storm", p. 353-372) as the characters are caught in a rainstorm. It takes the reader the same amount of time to read the story as it does for the characters to escape the rainstorm. Smith brought his experience as an animator into his comics by employing broad drama that indicates time lapses and great distances. He also focuses on panels that run sequentially in time and depict actions only seconds or minutes apart. As a result of this mix, the cartooning itself has a lock hold on the reader.

Much of the humor appears independently of the drama. In the first three books, comedy is more prevalent, while in the last six, the story evolves into a darker heroic fantasy as the comedic elements recede. However, even in the midst of a battle, Smith sometimes slows the action into a series of minute movements that make the reader pause and smile.

As the story darkens, Smith employs humor, not only in the form of jokes, but also in the facial expressions and the characters' costumes.



Smith also keeps the humor alive by invoking new characters whose purpose is at least in part humorous, like the animals rescuing Fone Bone and Smiley in Book 5 (*Rock Jaw: Master of the Eastern Border*, "The Orphans", p. 631). The baby possums and Roderick the Raccoon's stand against the mountain lion, Rock Jaw, is humorous, demonstrating that much of the humor works independently from the primary storyline.

Background drawings come into play establishing a broader focus than the viewpoint of a particular character. The background also recedes when a particular character -- or group of characters -- becomes the focus (*Old Man's Cave*, "The Hollow Tree", p. 743). The realistic representation gives the cartoony Bone cousins credibility.

Once Scholastic Books began reprinting the series under its Graphix imprint, BONE transitioned from black & white to color. The two versions highlight different qualities. In the original black & white, the figures are better defined against the backgrounds, allowing the characters more of a theatrical presence. In the color versions, each panel becomes almost a mini drama itself. The addition of color may slow down the readers' eye, but it also provides them a fuller story to absorb and appreciate.



A Little History

It's evident from several interviews with Jeff Smith that the Bone characters were forming in his mind from a very early age, as Bone-like figures appear in his notebooks as early as fourth grade. Smith revisited these figures during his teen and college years. While a student at The Ohio State University (OSU), an early version of the BONE series appeared as "Thorn," a comic strip in the OSU daily paper, *The Lantern*. After leaving OSU, Smith shopped his newspaper strip versions of BONE, but found no takers. He put BONE aside and worked in animation.



Smiley Bone, Phoney Bone, and Fone Bone appear early on in Smith's childhood notebooks. *The Gem*, circa 1970

But the comics field was not far from his mind. After studying the comic book marketplace during the late 1980s, the first issue of BONE appeared in the summer of 1991. It appeared under the publishing imprint Cartoon Books, which Smith founded with his wife with the express purpose to publish BONE. By producing a comic book series, Smith had found a format that worked for telling the BONE story, which had evolved from a cartoon gag strip to an epic tale. So, while the BONE bi-monthly comic sprang like Athena, fully grown on the comic-book-reading public, the story was the result of years of work Smith had invested in the Bone characters prior to the release of the first BONE comic book. The early issues proved popular and went into multiple printings. In 1993 Cartoon Books reprinted issues 1-6 in the graphic novel *The Complete BONE Adventures Volume 1: Out from Boneville*. The collection did well and helped support the burgeoning graphic novel movement.

But the effort to get BONE into new readers' hands didn't stop there. Just as Smith had studied the comics market from the outside in the late 1980s, he studied it from the inside as a professional during the 1990s.



This effort resulted in a series of industry partnerships formed to promote BONE. Issues 21-27 were published by Image Comics, a company larger than Cartoon Books. *The Complete BONE Adventures Volume 1* (later renamed *Out from Boneville*) was serialized in *Disney Adventures* in 1997 and 1998. These efforts to promote the series were successful, and BONE made some small waves outside comic book stores. The graphic novels began appearing in public library collections in the mid 1990s.

Smith courted the public library field in an effort to garner support for his book.

He was a featured speaker at the 2002 American Library Association's first day-long graphic novel conference, "Get Graphic @ Your Library," sponsored by the Young Adults' Librarian's Group. Other cartoonists who spoke included Art Spiegelman, Colleen Doran and comics writer Neil Gaiman.

Cartoon Books continued to reprint the comics as a series of graphic novels, and when the story concluded in 2004, there were nine volumes of BONE in total. All nine were eventually collected in a single omnibus known as the *One Volume Edition*, a publishing format that became popular within the industry. In preparation, Smith reworked the story, correcting inconsistencies. As a result, the *One Volume Edition* became the official version of BONE. As readers had gravitated toward BONE in the graphic novel format a decade earlier, they were again drawn to the *One Volume Edition*



The nine original Cartoon Books BONE graphic novels published between 1993 and 2004

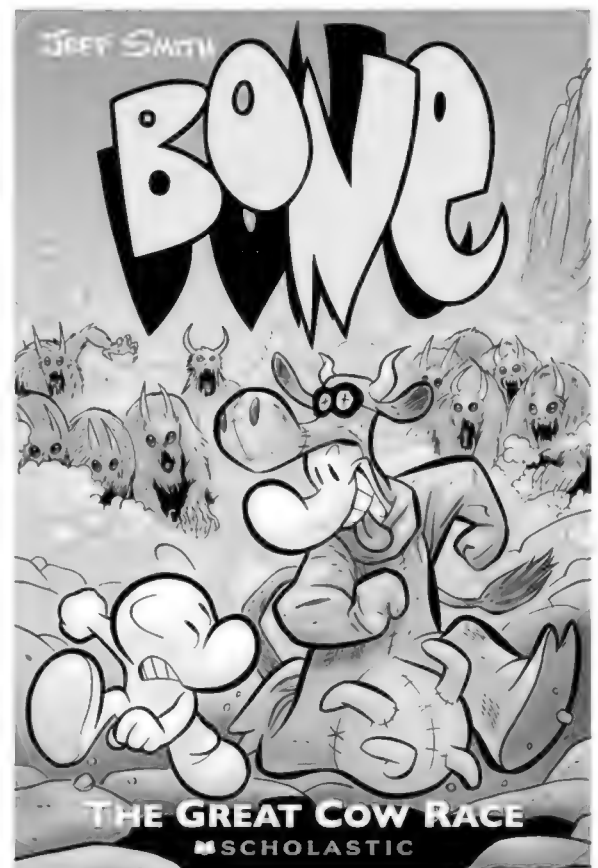
with its single omnibus format, which made it possible to read several years of a series in one durable big book.

The long journey to disseminate BONE wasn't finished. Scholastic Books started a graphic novel imprint and chose BONE as the first book in its new line. Beginning in 2005, all nine volumes of BONE were prepared for the trade market, using a smaller trim size and colored version. These books were released bi-annually so that reader interest wouldn't wane. A colored version of BONE had first been suggested by Art Spiegelman.

The partnership with Scholastic was no accident. Trade publishers other than Scholastic had approached Cartoon Books after 2002 with ideas that included reworking BONE for the general readership. These proposals generally included presenting BONE as an illustrated prose story. But Cartoon Books declined these offers. What they wanted was a way to build on Smith's cartoon epic, not a way to reformat it. When Scholastic offered to present a colored version of BONE for general readers, the best solution had been found.

BONE had undergone a publishing transformation similar to Art Spiegelman's *MAUS*: both began as black & white, self-published comic books and were repackaged by trade publishers. The end result was that both books reached a wider readership than was possible through self-publishing methods. One difference was that *MAUS* continued to be published in black & white, while BONE was transformed into a full-color story with the Scholastic editions.

It had been decades since Smith first began playing with the BONE characters, and more than a dozen years since the first BONE comic book had been published. But the long struggle was over; BONE was finally available to readers worldwide.





Cartoons, Comics, Star Wars and Early Graphic Novels

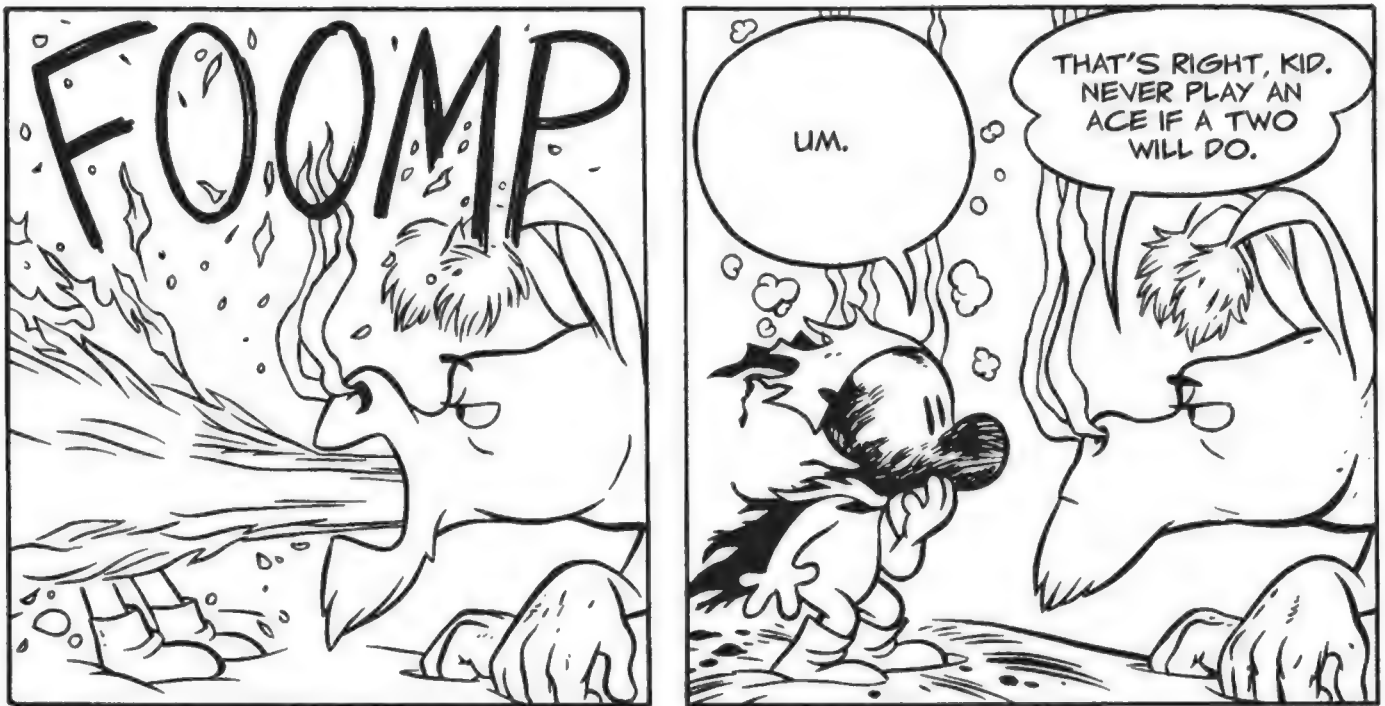
Just as BONE's characters and artwork were a confluence of several types of stories (adventure-epic, comedy, romance), the storytelling style was influenced by many factors, as well: cartoons, comic strips and comic books that Smith read as child; films that he watched, particularly *Star Wars*; and graphic novels he studied while examining the comic book field in the 1980s.

While Smith was growing up, some of the best animated cartoons were those produced by Warner Bros., whose chief animator was Chuck Jones (1912-2002). Jones created Bugs Bunny, Road Runner, Wile E. Coyote and many others. These characters were perennially getting themselves into scrapes and finding their way out in comical ways. Bugs Bunny outsmarted his enemies and coined the phrase, "What's up, Doc?" as a way of telling his opponent he wasn't afraid, while Road Runner simply outran Wile E. Coyote, often watching the coyote get caught in the very same trap he'd set for Road Runner. The cartoons were a perfect mix of exaggerated action and comedy. The comedy and the craziness of those Warner Bros. cartoons found their way into BONE. Although the Rat Creatures perennially chase Fone Bone and sometimes catch him, Fone Bone never seems to be in real danger, and the simple confidence displayed by Smiley Bone as he faces dangers is reminiscent of Bugs Bunny's dangling carrot as he escapes one trap after another.



Another storytelling device Smith incorporated from animated cartoons was the idea that one can survive great physical dangers and not be hurt while appearing to be badly injured. Coming off a great fall unhurt in an animated cartoon doesn't seem unrealistic at all; it strikes the viewer as funny because the viewer has suspended his sense of realism.

BONE includes a great deal of animated cartoon humor. One example is outlined when the Great Red Dragon rescues Fone Bone from the Rat Creatures in *Out from Boneville*. Fone Bone asks why the dragon let the Rat Creatures escape and the dragon breathes fire on Fone Bone, whose face is burnt badly while he remains unhurt (*Out from Boneville*, "Thorn", p. 50).



Another early influence was the newspaper comic strip, *Pogo* (1948-1975), which Smith read as a child. Created by cartoonist Walt Kelly (1913-1973) *Pogo* was populated by animal characters and set in Georgia's Okefenokee swamplands. The feature began in 1943 as a story in the comic book *Animal Tales*. Not long after, *Pogo* reappeared as a newspaper comic strip in 1948. It made its way into national newspapers in 1949 and ran until 1975. Much of the humor was political, but some was slapstick, too, so *Pogo* appealed to both young children and adults. Walt Kelly had worked for Disney Studios on films such as *Dumbo* and *Fantasia*, and he brought some animation techniques to his comic strip.

Pogo, a possum, did his best to stay out of trouble. Other major characters were Albert, an alligator, and Porky Pine, a porcupine. Albert, enthusiastic, loyal and slow-witted, was a foil for Pogo, while Pogo's other best friend, Porky Pine, was cynical by nature and never smiled. Other animals filled out the *Pogo* cast, but the three major *Pogo* characters bear many similarities to the three Bone cousins.

Smith was very excited about comics' potential thanks in part to *Prehysterical Pogo (in Pandemonia)*, a self-contained *Pogo* story reprinted from the newspaper strips in 1967 by Simon and Schuster in a paperback of the same name. The story was fantasy-based, and began with Pogo, Albert and Churchy the Turtle being blown sky high in an iron kettle, finally coming to rest in a prehistoric land where dinosaurs and cavemen lived. At the story's end, Pogo and his friends discovered that they were actually down under in Australia the whole time. Smith thought it was, "a beautiful book" and "the fattest comic book" he'd ever seen. *Prehysterical Pogo* enchanted young Smith and turned his mind to longer stories told in comic book format.



Kelly's work served as a model not only for types of cartoon characters and book length stories; *Pogo* influenced Smith's artistic style, as well. This fact is clear in Smith's generous, uncomplicated figures and the direct, uncluttered page design intended to keep readers focused on the story as opposed to the artwork itself.

Another cartoonist who influenced Smith while growing up was Joe Kubert (1926- 2012), who was known for his dynamic figures as well as backgrounds that evoked rather than overwhelmed the reader with details. Kubert's work reinforced the concept of character-centered panels, but it also presented evocative, imaginative backgrounds. Kubert's reputation rested in great part on drawing characters who weren't superheroes, such as *Sgt. Rock*, *Tor* and *Tarzan*. Although he was known as a comic book artist, as opposed to a comic strip artist like Walt Kelly, Kubert sometimes wrote as well as drew his own stories. People who wrote and drew their own stories always interested Smith.

Yet another cartoonist who left his mark on Smith was Don Martin (1931- 2000), a strip cartoonist for *MAD Magazine*. Martin was known for his zany, fast-paced comic strips that relied heavily on visual gags. As Martin was not working in narrative, the characters often remained nameless. When a character needed to be named, Martin would often call him or her "Mr. Fonebone," or "Dr. Fonebone" or "Mrs. Fonebone." When Smith was creating names for his characters, he remembered



On the bookshelf in Jeff's studio: The Completely MAD Don Martin, Terry and the Pirates, Pogo, and the Joe Kubert Artist Edition of Tarzan. On the wall is an original Pogo daily strip

the “Fonebones” from Martin’s strips and named his characters “Bone,” partially as a tribute to Martin. However, Smith split the name and used different first names, giving his characters more individuality than the people in Martin’s zany strips.

Smith was also influenced by movies, particularly George Lucas’ (1944-) first *Star Wars* trilogy. As a teenager, Smith saw *A New Hope* three times in the movie theater during the summer of 1977. The tale of Luke Skywalker, Princess Leia and Han Solo reinforced epic, mythical story lines. When it came time to give personalities to the characters included in the BONE story, Smith used some of the things he had learned while studying *Star Wars*. Like Luke and Princess Leia, Princess Thorn grows up unaware of her royal heritage, and like Luke Skywalker, she faces her final test without finishing her training. Like Han Solo, gruff innkeeper Lucius Down hides a big heart with a rough exterior. And, there are some similarities between the absurdity of the droids R2-D2 and C-3PO being caught up in an intergalactic battle in *Star Wars* and the Bone cousins finding themselves critical to the defense of the Valley in BONE.

Star Wars also helped provide the structure for BONE. The overall BONE story is told in three parts, just as the original *Star Wars* story was told as three consecutive feature films: *A New Hope*, *The Empire Strikes Back* and *The Return of the Jedi*. BONE was told in three separate sections, with each section including three graphic novels. The three books are: Book 1: *The Valley or Vernal Equinox*, which includes *Out from Boneville*, *The Great Cow Race* and *Eyes of the Storm*; Book 2: *Phoney Strikes Back or Solstice*, comprised of *The Dragonslayer*, *Rockjaw: Master of the Eastern Border* and *Old Man’s Cave*; and Book 3: *Friends and Enemies or Harvest*, including *Ghost Circles*, *Treasure Hunters* and *Crown of Horns*.

Star Wars also sent Smith to a school of his own making. After studying the films themselves, Smith researched some of the books that had inspired the films, particularly *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, a seminal study of mythology and the hero’s journey, by Joseph Campbell.

Other influences can also be noted. The first *Star Wars* trilogy ran

from 1977-1983. At roughly the same time, the comic book industry was experiencing a resurgence by way of “self-published” comic books, produced by cartoonists themselves or small publishing companies. In some ways, self-published books were an outgrowth of the Underground Comix of the late 1960s and early 1970s. These “Undergrounds” often espoused political viewpoints and sexual practices that made them unacceptable to the major comic book publishing houses. As a result, cartoonists were forced to publish and distribute these books themselves, thus giving birth to the cartoonist-entrepreneur. By the late 1970s, the “Underground” movement in comics had dwindled. Self-published books were now considered part of the “Alternative” comics movement, because these books offered readers an alternative to the books produced by Marvel and DC Comics. Many of these Alternative comic books were more personal and political than the books produced by the major comic book companies, aligning them with Underground Comix, and were published in black & white rather than color because color was expensive.

One of the most successful self-published comic books was a 1984 black & white book, *The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, written and drawn by Peter Laird (1954-) and Kevin Eastman (1962-). *The Ninja Turtles* told the story of four turtles, all named after Renaissance painters and trained in the martial arts.

The stories were both funny and action-filled and were popular with children and adults.

While cartoonists were starting small companies to publish their own stories, both Marvel and DC Comics were experimenting with new kinds of stories featuring well-known superheroes. One cartoonist in



Frank Miller's influence in *Eyes of the Storm*

particular whose work affected Smith was Frank Miller (1957-). Miller's career took off when he began writing and drawing *Daredevil* for Marvel Comics. Instead of focusing on the super-heroic aspects of the story, Miller turned the comic book into a detective thriller. He experimented with techniques he had learned from studying Japanese and European cartoonists, and he made *Daredevil* one of the most engaging comics distributed by Marvel Comics. By the mid 1980s, Miller was one of the most revered cartoonists in mainstream comics.

As important as Miller's *Daredevil* comics were, his next superhero project was even more prominent. In 1986, he both wrote and drew an experimental series for DC Comics focusing on the hero Batman, entitled *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*. Miller aimed the comic at older teens and adults as opposed to children, and in his story Batman is 50 years old and forced out of retirement. The Joker returns, as well, and the two battle as they had in earlier years. The complete story ended with Batman relinquishing his superhero identity and beginning a covert operation to protect Gotham City.

From Miller's work, Smith learned much about story pacing, as well as ways to tell a comic book story with a beginning, middle and end. Like Walt Kelly, Miller influenced Smith's art style. A good example of this point can be found in the stark, bold, full-page illustration focusing on Gran'ma (*Eyes of the Storm*, "Road Trip", p. 332), one of the few full-page illustrations in the entire 1,300-page book.



Thorn confronts her nemesis for the first time in *Eyes of the Storm*

Smith also learned about themes from Miller's work. One of the critical points expressed in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* was that each hero had his nemesis. In *Dark Knight*, Batman had the Joker. In *BONE*, Thorn had Kingdok and Gran'ma Ben (Rose) had Briar (Rose's sister), The Hooded One.

Watchmen, written by Alan Moore (1953-) and illustrated by Dave Gibbons (1949-) was another complete long-form story contemporary to *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*. It was also a sophisticated superhero story aimed at older teens and adult readers, and was published by DC Comics.

Watchmen made a political statement while presenting a lively story of superheroes as outlawed vigilantes. The book appeared as a limited comic book series in 1986, the same year as Frank Miller's *Batman* book. It was repackaged as a graphic novel in 1987. For the *Watchmen* story, writer Moore and artist Gibbons employed a wide range of storytelling techniques. Part of the book was comprised of long prose pieces, while other pages contained no words at all. Still other pages read like a traditional comic book, making *Watchmen* technically unlike any comic book ever seen before.

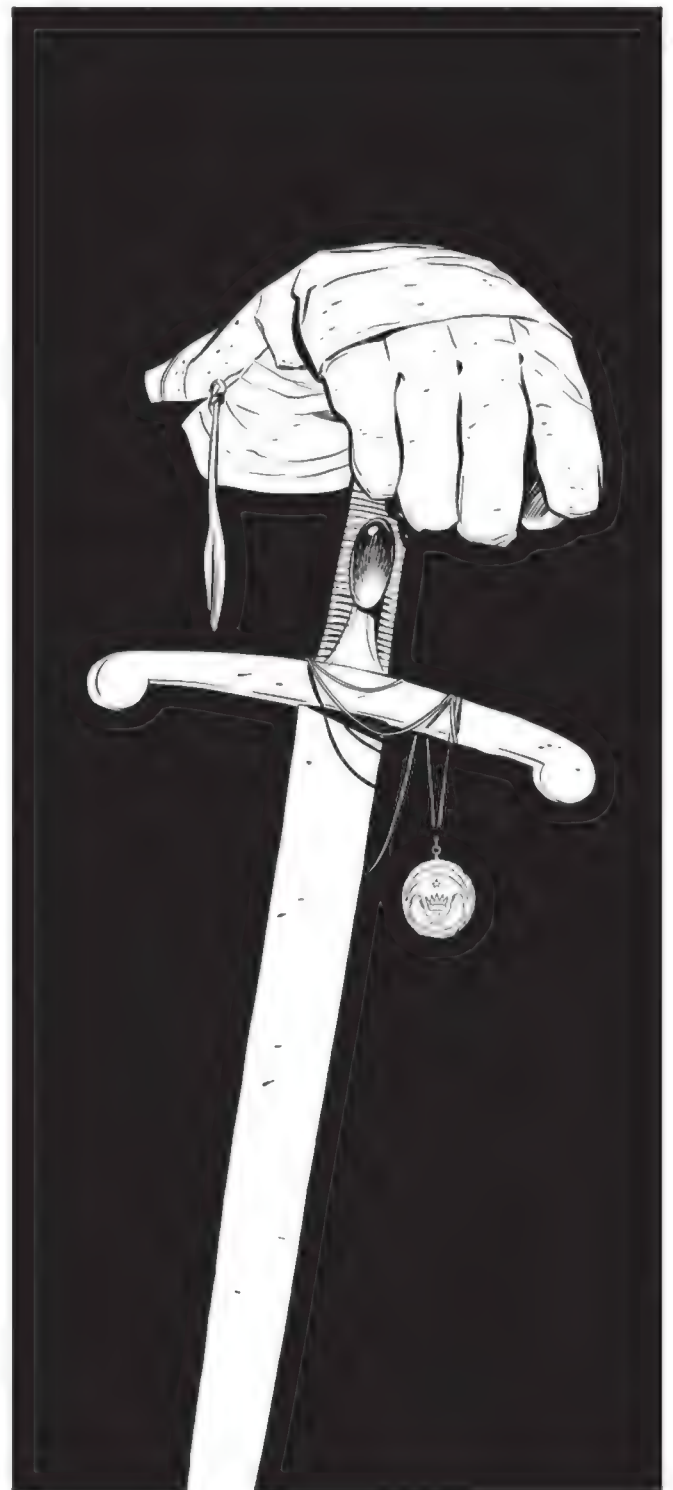
Watchmen also offered a complete story whose characters didn't appear in an ongoing series. Both in presentation style and in content, the book was another example of the ways in which comic books were changing. It also provided a glimpse into some of the advantages the graphic novel format could offer.

Another graphic novel that made a huge impression on Smith was *MAUS: A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History*, by Art Spiegelman (1948-). Like Frank Miller, Spiegelman both drew and wrote *MAUS*, as opposed to a writer and illustrator working together as in *Watchmen*. Before being repackaged by Pantheon Books, *MAUS* first appeared as one of several ongoing stories in *RAW*, an Underground Comix book published by Spiegelman himself.

While books such as *Batman: the Dark Knight Returns* and *Watchmen* used superhero concepts to tell more serious, adult stories, *MAUS* grew out of the funny animal story tradition in comics; but, unlike *Pogo*, *MAUS* was not satirical or funny. *MAUS* told the story of Spiegelman's parents' hardships while surviving the Nazi concentration camps during World War II, and the story of Spiegelman's own upbringing as the son of concentration camp survivors. Spiegelman softened the brutal story by portraying Jewish people as mice, the Germans as cats and the Polish people as pigs.

MAUS was published in book format by Pantheon Books in 1986. One of the very first graphic novels to reach outside the borders of the comic book specialty shop, it became a phenomenon. Tens of thousands of readers who didn't normally read comic book stories were moved by *MAUS*, and Spiegelman became a celebrity. The second volume, *MAUS II: A Survivor's Tale: And Here My Troubles Began*, was published in 1991, and in 1992, Spiegelman was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for his work.

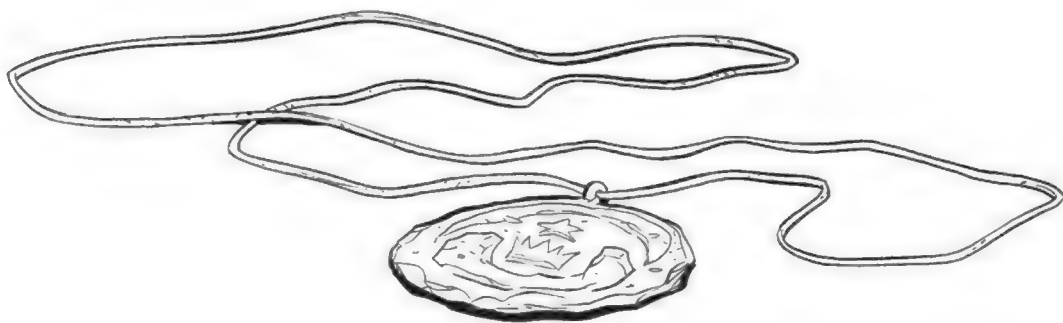
For Smith, *MAUS* was instructive in a number of ways. Here was another long-form story, with a beginning, middle and end, that was not about superheroes, but instead used animals as metaphors. It should be mentioned that although reprinted for trade readers by Pantheon Books, *MAUS* remained in black & white, like most non-superhero comic books

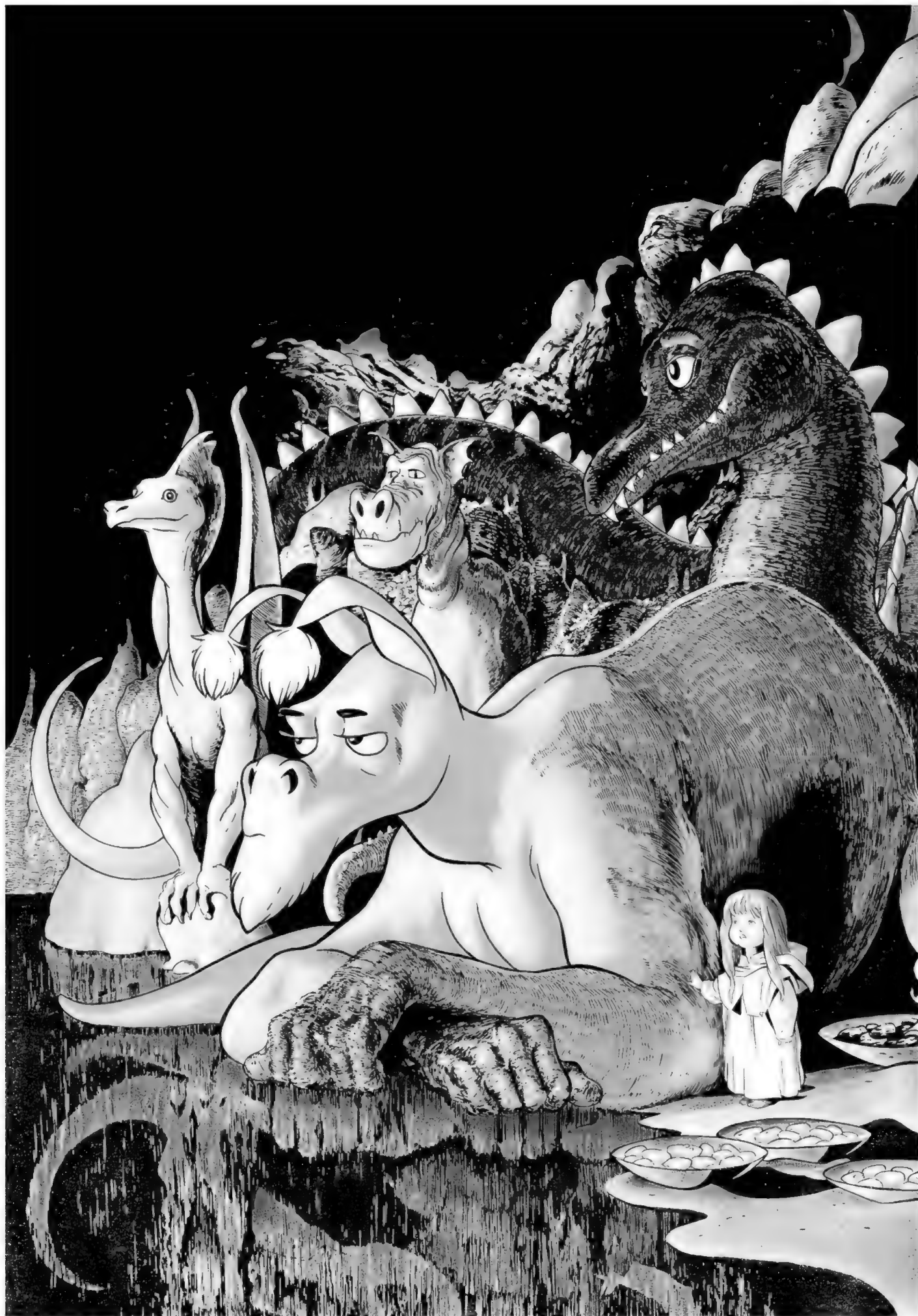


of the 1980s. Spiegelman's self-published story proved so powerful that it reached readers outside of comic book shops, and that meant other graphic novels, if singular enough, might make the same breakthrough.

The trio of *MAUS*, *Watchmen*, and *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* made enough noise to be heard outside of the small world of comic book stores. This fact was true in part because Pantheon Books promoted *MAUS* the way they would any trade book, but also because *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* and *Watchmen* received unprecedented attention from media outlets. These three books all appeared in 1986, and formed the beginning of the "graphic novel revolution."

The stage was set. Where the syndicated-newspaper-strip version of BONE had failed to even see the light of day, a self-published comic book might succeed. One didn't necessarily need the backing of a major publisher; the less formal comic book marketplace might support a small company amid industry giants. Smith was beginning to see that there was a venue and a strong enough readership for the kind of long comic book story he hoped to tell using his Bone characters, so he launched Cartoon Books. But a long, structured epic disguised as an ongoing humor comic book had to be more than a string of gags, it had to tell a single story from beginning to end over dozens of issues and a dozen years. To do that, graphic novels would need to move toward the cultural center.





The Story And Its Influences

The nine BONE graphic novels fall in this order: *Out from Boneville*; *The Great Cow Race*; *Eyes of the Storm*; *The Dragonslayer*; *Rockjaw: Master of the Eastern Border*; *Old Man's Cave*; *Ghost Circles*; *Treasure Hunters* and *Crown of Horns*. All nine are collected in the *BONE: One Volume Edition*. There are also two ancillary books: *Rose*, written by Smith and illustrated by Charles Vess, which tells an important story from Rose's (Gran'ma Ben) childhood, and *BONE: Tall Tales*, written by Tom Sniegowski and illustrated by Smith, which presents adventures similar to stories of the founding of the American West.

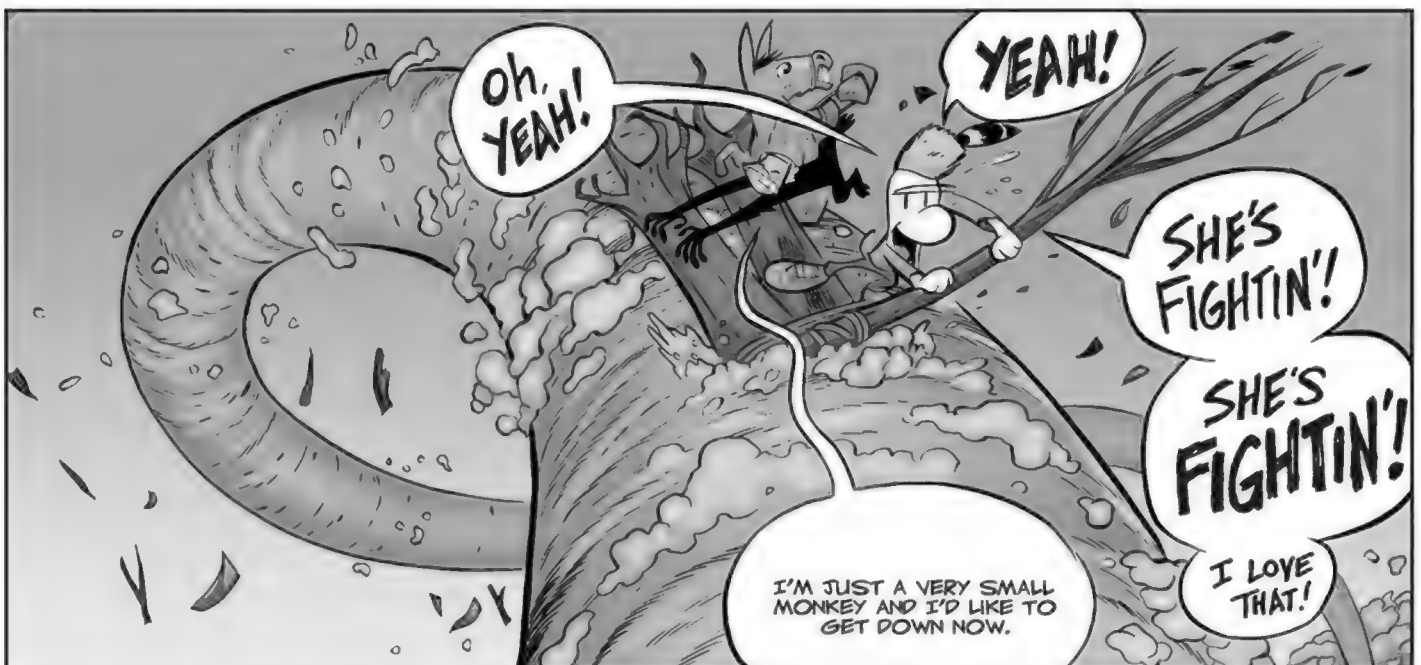
Rose provides background to the BONE story and explains how Briar became The Hooded One. It chronicles Rose's (Gran'ma Ben) childhood conflicts with her older sister Briar, as well as a time when dragons interacted freely with humans.

The artwork in *Rose* is done in an airy, painterly style, reminiscent of



classic fantasy illustration. The style directly contradicts the cartoony artwork in *BONE*. The artwork and the humorless tone are appropriate as *Rose* is a very serious story. It is possible to read *Rose* after *BONE*, Book 6, *Old Man's Cave*, as it provides background specifically linked to the events occurring in that book.

BONE: Tall Tales chiefly provides a context for *BONE*, as it relates a few escapades of "Big Johnson Bone," the mythic founder of Boneville. In contrast with the influences derived from the storytelling tradition of Western Europe, *Tall Tales* sounds distinctly American, similar to tales of frontier hero Paul Bunyan. The contrast works nicely and demonstrates that Smith's influences are wide ranging.



Big Johnson Bone taming a twister in *Bone: Tall Tales*

The story of Fone Bone, Phoney and Smiley begins as they are run out of Boneville because, while campaigning for office, Phoney has made himself a public enemy. When they stumble into the uncharted Valley and find the map, their new adventure begins.

Almost immediately the characters are defined: Fone Bone appears reasonable and helpful; Phoney, bossy and explosive; and Smiley, agreeable and careless. The Great Red Dragon, the Rat Creatures and Thorn are also introduced. The cousins are separated and Fone Bone stumbles upon the Rat Creatures while looking for them. A sudden,

severe winter storm stops any attempts on Fone Bone's part to find his cousins and return to Boneville.

Readers are also introduced to Smith's storytelling style, which is relaxed and confident. He views the characters with humor and compassion. Amid the humor, tension builds: Why doesn't Gran'ma admit dragons exist?

The next installment, *The Great Cow Race*, is often cited as the best single book in the series. The plot thickens as Smith masterfully interweaves drama and humor. Smith manages to inject curiosity and drama as the Rat Creatures chase the Bones into the midst of the race, thus breaking the fragile truce between the humans and the Rat Creatures signed several years before. As *The Great Cow Race* concludes, the reader is both amused and curious.



With *Eyes of the Storm*, Thorn and Fone Bone grow closer, which allows Thorn enough distance from her grandmother to begin the maturing process. The mystery of Thorn's past is revealed and the tension builds, in part because of Thorn's anger at being kept in the dark for years. Her distrust of Gran'ma makes her confide in Fone Bone more and their friendship deepens. In this world of indirect blood relatives (Thorn with her grandmother, Fone Bone with his cousins) both Thorn and Fone Bone are learning how to make independent alliances that facilitate growth.

In the next chapter, *The Dragonslayer*, we learn that independence can be painful. When learning of her heritage as The Awakened One, Thorn grows angry with Gran'ma and leaves. Meanwhile, Phoney works to convince the people of Barrelhaven that he can protect them from dragons (living in a border town has its dangers, but the dragons pose no threat to the people of Barrelhaven).

Fone Bone and Thorn go to town, and Fone discovers Bartleby, the baby Rat Creature whom Smiley hides. Thorn, growing even angrier, decides to return to the farmhouse. Perhaps there she will be unchanged and so relieved of her destiny. Fone and Smiley, unaware that Thorn has slipped off, head for the forest, to return Bartleby to his people.

The Great Red Dragon allows Phoney to capture him, to the relief of the people of Barrelhaven; however, seeing the dragon helpless empowers the



Rat Creatures to attack. The Hooded One was correct: the broken truce in *Cow Race* has escalated into a war. Phoney Bone has proved to be a catalyst for the war in the Valley, but not as she imagined. Thorn has returned, now able to accept her heritage as the Veni-Yan-Cari.

Rock Jaw, Master of the Eastern Border, follows Fone Bone and Smiley as they bring Bartleby to the mountains, intending to release the baby Rat Creature into the wild so he can be with his kind. The Bones are captured by Rock Jaw, a giant mountain lion who intends to turn them over to The Hooded One.



Independent of the Bones' dilemma, Roderick, a raccoon, is hunting the Rat Creatures because they killed his parents. He is aided by the young possums who know the Bones. This group of animals discovers that the Bones are in trouble and sets out to rescue them. Many scrapes and near-captures, both humorous and sometimes terrifying, ensue, but the Bones and their rescuers survive each one. As the adventure concludes, Bartleby is released into the wild, but the Bones have made an enemy of a disappointed Rock Jaw.



Roque Ja, or Rock Jaw, as the Bones call him, captures our heroes

At first, this episode seems like a tangent as Thorn is absent, making it peripheral to Thorn's quest. But in the overall picture, it offers a break before the intensity of the events in the next books, *Old Man's Cave* and *Ghost Circles*, which are dark and serious in tone.

Rumors abound that Kingdok is dead in the next book, *Old Man's Cave*. Thorn, fully aware of her power as the Veni-Yan-Cari, leads a small party to Old Man's Cave, while the Rat Creatures return to their encampment.

Thorn searches for Fone Bone and Smiley who haven't returned yet from setting Bartleby free. Thorn still doesn't trust Gran'ma Ben completely. Briar, in her incarnation as The Hooded One, is still able to tempt Lucius. She distracts him as the Rat Creatures attack. Rock Jaw has been assigned to find Thorn. While all this is happening, Gran'ma prepares for the coming war.

In the next installment, *Ghost Circles*, the war rages. Kingdok is still alive and hunts Thorn. After a failed attempt to free her master, Briar has died, but is resurrected by the Lord of the Locusts, who covers the valley in a deadly ash (ghost circles). Thorn is able to lead the others through the deadly ghost circles because she is The Awakened One.

The Hooded One appears, leading a pack of Rat Creatures, chasing Thorn and the others. Bartleby suddenly emerges out of the pack, leading Thorn and the others to safety. The company must go through Tannen Gard, a dragon burial ground. No one has survived traveling through a dragon burial ground.

Back at Old Man's Cave, the villagers and the holy order of the Veni-Yan-Cari decide to leave Old Man's Cave and go to Atheia, the ancient capital, risking entrapment in the ghost circles. The humor so prominent in the early BONE books is almost completely absent in *Ghost Circles*. This story has become very serious, and readers are not convinced that all the good guys will survive.



The next book, *Treasure Hunters*, finds the company sneaking into the city of Atheia while hiding Bartleby. The city is under the rule of a usurper named Tarsil, who has outlawed the belief in dragons. Meanwhile, Lucius leads the other survivors from Old Man's Cave to the city. All other members of the Valley are trapped in a suspended, near-dead state until the ghost circles can be lifted. Briar leads an army of Pawans (humans from the Eastern Mountains) and Rat Creatures against Atheia.

Gran'ma Ben seeks the council of high priests who believe that Thorn is too young to lead. But they reconsider upon learning that Thorn's deceased mother has instructed her to find the "Crown of Horns." With the single exception of Thorn, only dragons can speak to the dead.

Thorn and Gran'ma attend a secret meeting of dragon worshippers, which is broken up by the military. Thorn goes into hiding.

Phoney Bone smells gold hidden in the city. Although he finds it, he and Smiley are captured. While rescuing a little girl, Thorn and Fone Bone are captured as well. Briar's army attacks.

Smith does a nice job of adding

light into this dark story with humorous touches, primarily through the interplay of Smiley and Bartleby, but also in absurd visual details such as the hats the Bones wear.

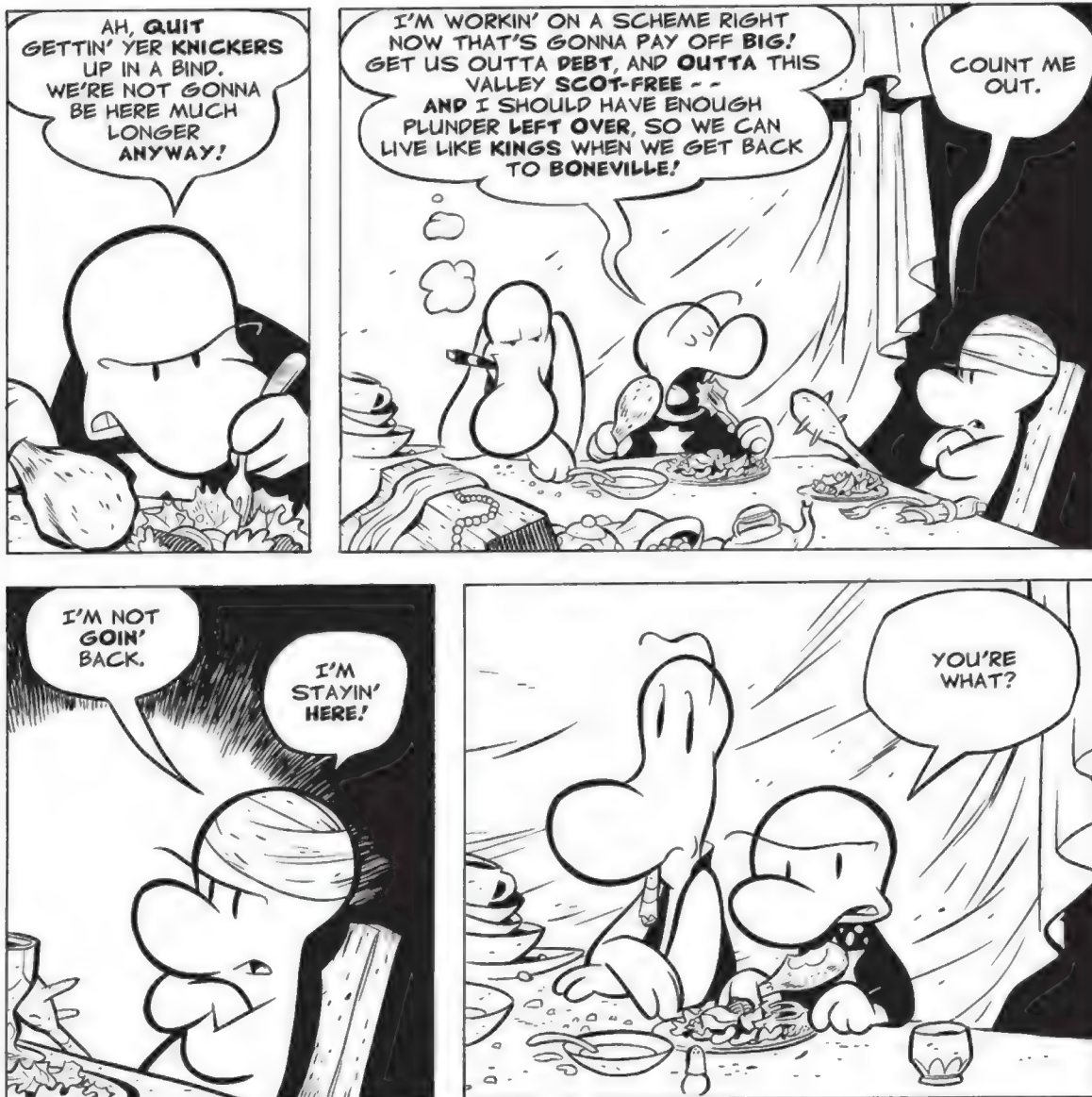
In *Crown of Horns*, the next chapter, Thorn searches for the Crown of Horns, which balances the powers of good and of evil. The dragon priests believe that Thorn need only touch the relic, and evil will be defeated. Thorn has to first battle Kingdok, who guards it, but after defeating him, she is trapped and can't physically reach the Crown of Horns. By forming a chain with Fone Bone, she is able to touch the Crown through him, releasing a light that destroys Briar and returns the locusts to Mim's body.

The kingdom is now Thorn's. Although she wants Fone Bone to remain at her side, he returns home with his cousins and Bartleby, the baby Rat Creature. So ends *Crown of Horns* and the Bones' adventure. Smith does a nice job lightening the somber story with playful body language.

Over the course of the BONE story, the four major characters -- Fone Bone, Thorn, Phoney Bone and Smiley Bone -- grow. A good example of the complexity of character development reveals itself in Fone Bone's relationship with Princess Thorn. Although Fone Bone is decidedly not human, he has a very human-like crush on the princess (*Out from Boneville*, "Thorn", p. 61) and is devoted to her. His infatuation grows as the story goes on (*Eyes of the Storm*, "Moby Bone", p. 298). He becomes her confidant as she unravels the mysteries of her past, confiding to Fone



Bone that she drew the map he found in the desert...the map that led him to the Valley (*The Great Cow Race*, "The Cave", p. 191). Early on, Fone Bone's primary objective is to return to Boneville (*The Great Cow Race*, "The Cave", p. 179) but it doesn't remain that way. One pivotal moment occurs when Fone Bone tells cousin Phoney Bone that, instead of returning to Boneville, he wants to stay and help Thorn win the battle for control of the Valley (*The Dragonslayer*, "The Straggler", p. 509). This is no longer a schoolboy crush; Fone Bone has come to understand that Thorn needs him in order to succeed in her quest. And when pushed, Fone Bone is strong enough to stand up to the formidable Gran'ma, who wants Thorn to stay with her rather than going off on her own (*The Dragonslayer*, "Council in the Dark", p. 493).

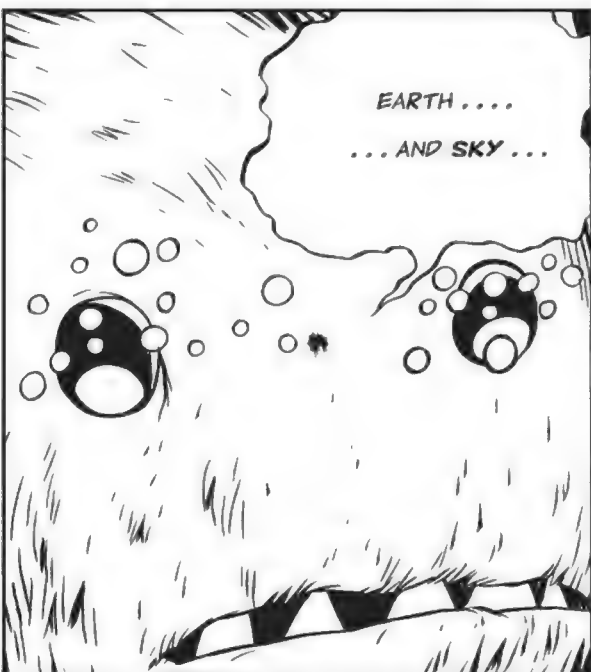


Without hesitation, Fone Bone leaps to defend Thorn against The Hooded One (*Ghost Circles*, “Darker Truths”, p. 917), and later, he proves to be the one who saves the Valley by using static electricity, conducting Thorn’s energy to the Crown of Horns through his own body (*Crown of Horns*, “Chamber of Horns”, p. 1273). However, after Thorn is crowned queen, Fone Bone chooses to return to Boneville with his cousins (*Crown of Horns*, “River Crossing”, p. 1323), though not without regret.



Thorn, the farm girl hiding out with her grandmother, who becomes queen, is very complicated. When Fone Bone meets her, she is unaware that she is of royal

blood or that she lived with dragons (*Out from Boneville*, “Thorn”, p. 55). After meeting Fone Bone she suspects something is being hidden from her (*The Great Cow Race*, “The Cave”, p. 191). She grows greatly attached to Fone Bone (*The Great Cow Race*, “Lonesome Road”, p. 242). She is able to summon enough courage to stand up to her iron-willed grandmother



(*Eyes of the Storm*, “Eyes of the Storm”, p. 357). She learns of her royal heritage (*Eyes of the Storm*, “Mending Fences”, p. 387). Armed with this knowledge, she grows strong enough to defend Gran’ma against Kingdok (*The Dragonslayer*, “Earth & Sky”, p. 478). Finally, she meets Red Dragon (*The Dragonslayer*, “The Turning”, p. 575). After some doubt, she accepts her destiny and picks up a sword (*The Dragonslayer*, “The Turning”, p. 580). Thorn realizes her power by stopping the villagers from harming the Red Dragon

(*The Dragonslayer*, “On the Dragon’s Stair”, p. 596). She takes on her role as leader by defending Phoney Bone (*Old Man’s Cave*, “The Hollow Tree”, p. 737). All the while, Thorn depends heavily on Fone Bone’s advice (*Old Man’s Cave*, “The Hollow Tree”, p. 745). She accepts her role as The Awakened One (*Old Man’s Cave*, “Blood Moon”, p. 832). Thorn fully realizes her magic powers by traveling in and out of the ghost circles (*Ghost Circles*, “The Root Cellar”, p. 945), and she is able to fend off Briar while listening to the ghost of her dead mother (*Treasure Hunters*, “The Cold Spot”, p. 1017). Alone in her ability to communicate with the dead, she speaks with her dead mother (*Crown of Horns*, “The Parapet”, p. 1136). Thorn grows so powerful that she’s able to fly over her enemies (*Crown of Horns*, “Escape from the City”, p. 1230). However, even as she has killed her arch foe Kingdok, she is able to reach the Crown of Horns only with the help of Fone Bone (*Crown of Horns*, “Chamber of Horns”, p. 1262). As the story concludes, she realizes that Fone Bone must return to Boneville with his cousins and that she is strong enough to rule without his support (*Crown of Horns*, “River Crossing”, p. 1323).



Thorn rescues the Dragon at sunrise in *The Dragonslayer*

Smiley Bone, who appears to be concerned with surface pleasure and decisions, changes profoundly during the course of the Bones' journey. Initially taking orders from Phoney Bone (*The Great Cow Race*, "The Great Cow Race", p. 218), the simple Bone proves more complex by tricking Lucius into fixing the roof while he relaxes (*The Great Cow Race*, "Up on the Roof", p. 266). He returns to his silly persona (*Eyes of the Storm*, "Road Trip", p. 323) but shows emotional growth as the time nears to release Bartleby back into the wild (*Rock Jaw, Master of the Eastern Border*, "Call of the Wild", p. 718). Later, he surprises Fone Bone by advising him not to listen to Phoney's orders (*Ghost Circles*, "Prayer Stones", p. 963). He appears happiest with Bartleby, who accepts him unconditionally (*Ghost Circles*, "Prayer Stones", p. 984). Smiley also is strong enough to defend Bartleby to Gran'ma (*Treasure Hunters*, "The Gates of Atheia", p. 1003). He exhibits profound regret while realizing that he may return to Boneville without Bartleby (*Treasure Hunters*, "Moonwort", p. 1072). As the story progresses, he admonishes Phoney Bone for not supporting Fone Bone (*Crown of Horns*, "Homecoming", p. 1303).

When the Bones return to Boneville at the tale's end, Bartleby is in tow (*Crown of Horns*, "River Crossing", p. 1332).

Phoney Bone appears to change the least throughout BONE. The story begins as the Bones are run out of Boneville because the townspeople are after Phoney. He is intelligent, manipulative and always scheming unsuccessfully to turn a buck. His redeeming trait is that he is devoted to his cousins and will attempt to overcome any obstacles on their behalf. Still, although he has acknowledged sacrificial, heroic actions in others that he himself would not undertake, and he has seen that personal sacrifice yields rewards, his



ability to look out for number one remains rock solid. He is astonished when Gran'ma and Lucius become concerned about Thorn's whereabouts, and Lucius immediately goes to search for her alone, even though Rat Creatures are in the area (*Old Man's Cave*, "Dragons in the Earth", p. 754). Phoney Bone's moment of crisis occurs when Gran'ma Ben offers him the opportunity to return to Boneville without his cousins, and Phoney refuses (*Crown of Horns*, "Escape from the City", p. 1219). But, as he returns to Boneville at the story's close, he seems little changed.

Smiley Bone is the most complex of the Bones, and Thorn is the most complicated of the human characters. In terms of a power hierarchy, the two characters are diametrically opposed: Thorn is on top; Smiley is at the bottom.

As the Bone cousins return to Boneville, their interpersonal dynamic hasn't changed. When the story opens, Smiley wants a dollar from Phoney before he gives up the map (*Out from Boneville*, "The Map", p. 19). As the story closes, Smiley wants a gold coin from Phoney before giving him a snack (*Crown of Horns*, "River Crossing", p. 1332).

In the BONE saga, Smith both adheres to and departs from the western heroic tradition. A cartoon epic in itself is a departure from the tradition, which is oral. J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (arguably the most famous fantasy-adventure) embodies many aspects of western heroic literature. There are a few parallels of note. The Bones, like the hobbits, are surprisingly important inside a larger quest. Like hobbits, the Bones provide comic relief, and their presence on a battlefield is both humorous and a cause for human warrior concern. It is also heroic. Like Aragorn and the hero of Greek mythology Oedipus, Thorn, the true ruler, grows up far from her kingdom. The company in *The Lord of the Rings* was advised by Gandalf. King Arthur had Merlin. The advisor in BONE is the cigar-smoking and wise-cracking Red Dragon. The Great Red Dragon may also represent a nod to Welsh mythology, as one Welsh story features a red dragon defeating a white dragon, symbolizing the Welsh defeat of the Saxons.

BONE's structure loosely follows the structure of Tolkien's work in the sense that *The Hobbit* is more comedic than *The Lord of the Rings*, just as the first three BONE books are more humorous than the darker, later books. In part to draw readers in, Smith focused on more comedic elements in the early books, in the same way that Tolkien made *The Hobbit* in part a comedy.

BONE also embodies mythic patterns often found in epic literature, such as the heroine who grows up away from her kingdom (Thorn), the assistant (Fone Bone) and the nemesis (Briar, The Hooded One). But it also introduces new characters, such as Ted the Bug and Bartleby.

Like *The Odyssey*, BONE is a nostoi, or a "return" story. The adventure ends as the Bones return to Boneville, just as *The Odyssey* ended as Odysseus returned to Ithaca.

There are some traces of Hindu religion and mythology present—Mim is influenced by the goddess Kali, both creator and destroyer. As Taneal explains to Thorn, "This is also Mim—but in her dark aspect," (*Treasure Hunters*, "The Gates of Atheia", p. 999). The city of Atheia is based on Kathmandu. There's also a nod to Norse Mythology: the dragon Queen Mim encircling the world is reminiscent of the Midgard Serpent, who will rise up on Ragnarok (the final battle) with the Asgardian gods.

BONE is also influenced by "Dreamtime," an Aboriginal mythological conceit, believing that everything has its place in the balance of all things. This fact is well stated in the book *Rose*. Teenager Rose chose not



to preserve that balance, thereby setting in motion forces that caused the war that occurs in BONE, as well as the previous war 15 years earlier. In the BONE world, all creatures speak the same language and are able to hear “the hum of the earth” if they listen carefully. Powerful people, such as The Hooded One, are able to communicate with people through dreams. Evil, which was brought in by the Lord of the Locust, might destroy the Valley, so one of the undercurrents of BONE is the hope that when the true Queen arrives, the natural order of all things will be restored.

BONE makes several references to Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* (1851). Fone Bone reads it aloud in different instances, while it puts others to sleep. In one sequence, Moby Dick informs a gas-induced Fone Bone dream (*Ghost Circles*, “The Promise”, p 877-896), and the name Bartleby was inspired by Melville’s short story, “Bartleby the Scrivener.” *Moby Dick* was an epic-adventure that inspired Smith to raise the bar for cartoon storytelling, as well as fueling his interest in telling a complete story in a cartoon book format, as opposed to prose.

The American classic that bore the biggest imprint on Smith, however, was Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884). Like BONE, *Huck Finn* is also the story of runaways; in this case, Twain’s heroes were Huck Finn and the slave named Jim. While Huck experiences many dangerous situations, the humor and the pace of the storytelling assure readers that Huck will triumph. The con men with whom Huck and Jim connect devise schemes that could be taken from Phoney Bone’s guidebook. And like *Huck Finn*, BONE starts out comically before evolving into a darker, more complex storyline.

Structurally, BONE also resembles *Huckleberry Finn*. The first three BONE books are lighter and similar in tone to the first few chapters of *Huck Finn*, while the last six books are darker and more mysterious, also similar to Twain’s masterpiece. One of the innovations BONE brought to fantasy literature was to meld aspects of American realism with fantastic elements.

Although BONE falls within the Western European epic tradition, it becomes a distinctly American story: The hero is not crowned at the resolution or rewarded with gold like Aragorn in *The Lord of the Rings* or Odysseus in *The Odyssey*. Instead, like American protagonists Ishmael (*Moby Dick*), Huck Finn (*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*) and Nick Carraway (*The Great Gatsby*), the Bones conclude their story by going home as empty-handed survivors. The reward for experience is experience.



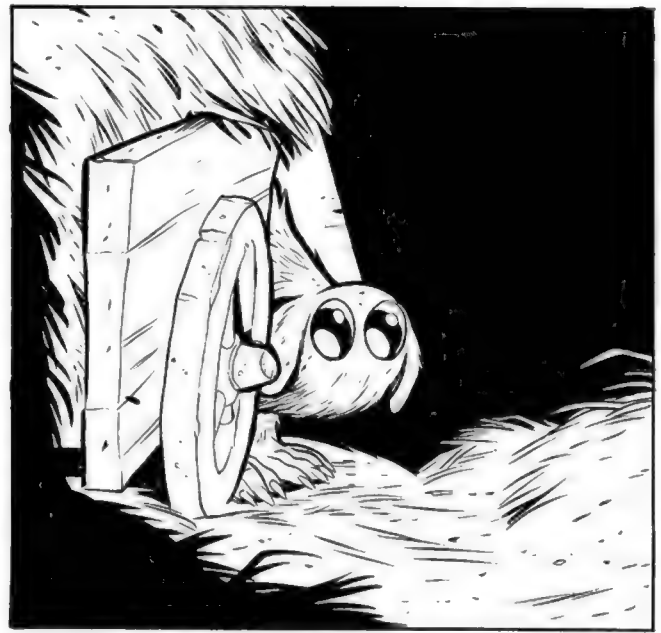
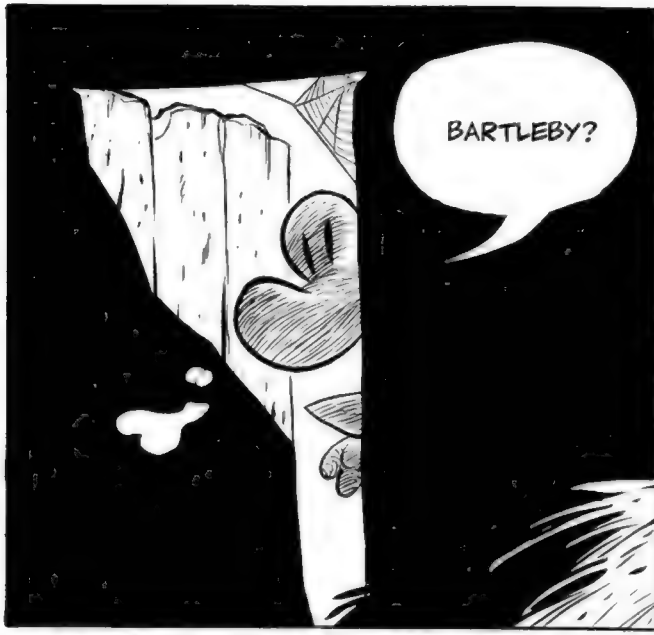


Conclusion

Like earlier American classics such as *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Red Pony* and *Huckleberry Finn*, BONE was originally intended for adult readers. Only later was it marketed as a book for children. Like other American classics such as *Leaves of Grass* by Walt Whitman, BONE was initially self-published. Yet the cartoon epic made its own path: when the *BONE: One Volume Edition* was published after 12 years of work, Smith had created “the fattest comic book” anyone had ever seen, recreating the early experience he’d had as a boy with *Prehysterical Pogo*.

One of a handful of early comic books series to be conceived as a complete story, Smith and Iyer believed that newer readers would need cheap, easily available collections of the early chapters in order to keep up. This resulted in an effort by Cartoon Books to keep all the chapters of BONE in print and on store shelves, totaling nine volumes in 13 years.





BONE is also an anomaly in another way. Almost without exception, the graphic novels that have risen from the comic book industry and gone onto permeate the trade readership have been autobiographical. BONE is a fantasy.

BONE played a major part in two graphic novel revolutions, first within the comic book field in the 1990s and then within the trade publishing industry during this century. Interest in BONE both inside and outside of the comic book marketplace inspired much of the proliferation of graphic novels in general, as well as inspiring numerous cartoonists, filmmakers and other creative artists. This development assures BONE's place in literary and popular-culture history.

Smith's ability to seamlessly join together diverse aspects of our storytelling heritages -- the epic, romantic and comedic -- gives BONE a timeless feel. BONE's wide dissemination may place it among the ranks of other American classics such as *The Catcher in the Rye* and *A Separate Peace*, but more importantly, Fone Bone, Thorn, Gran'ma Ben, Smiley Bone, Phoney, Lucius, Briar and Bartleby tell us a story of struggle, power, sacrifice and redemption. As these characters grow, readers are reminded that change is possible in their own lives, and that both risk taking and humor are essential ingredients for self-discovery.

Epics are stories that change with us; each reading brings a different meaning because the experiences we bring to these books change over time. The symbolism also changes since we identify with different characters as our experiences grow. For example, a young person identifies with Antigone and an older person with Creon in Sophocles' *The Antigone*. The stories we encounter during childhood often give us the most meaning because we're able to take them with us throughout our lives, but the connection to a particular story may happen at any point in our lives.

The comic book is an American invention. Originally called a "comic magazine" because it told funny little stories, the term became synonymous with superheroes in the wake of *Superman*, first published in 1938. Although the comic strip BONE never made it out of the gate, the humor-laden BONE comic book harkened back to the original meaning of "comic magazine," as Smith skillfully employed humor to tell his epic story. But Smith's greatest strength was in welding American cartooning and literary sensibilities with the European epic tradition, making BONE the first American epic of this century.





Interview With Jeff Smith

This interview was conducted by Stephen Weiner on Oct 19, 2013 at the Maynard Public Library, 77 Nason St, Maynard, Massachusetts, as part of a public program.

We are delighted to present Jeff Smith, the cartoonist behind BONE and his new book, RASL, and his new series Tuki: Save the Humans. Jeff grew up in Ohio and had aspirations to be a cartoonist from an early age. When no one wanted to publish his comic book, BONE, he and his wife started their own company to publish it. BONE received 41 national and international awards, which is pretty spectacular because the series was only 55 issues long. Along the way, Jeff collected the BONE story into a series of nine graphic novels and was one of the early adopters of the graphic novel format. These graphic novels were collected in a very long One Volume edition and printed in black & white. These graphic novels were republished in color by Scholastic Books, and BONE went outside of the comic book readership, receiving worldwide acclaim. Jeff's other books include Little Mouse Gets Ready and Shazam! The Monster Society of Evil, and his current series is Tuki: Save the Humans. Jeff's new book RASL just won an Eisner. He's here today to talk about his career.

SW: When you were growing up, at what age did you decide that you wanted to become a cartoonist?

JS: Very early on I always loved newspaper comics, the Sunday paper and loved cartoons on TV -- Bugs Bunny and Donald Duck, when those would be on -- and I loved comic books as a kid. I loved *Uncle Scrooge* and *Donald Duck* -- everything. *Archie*, *Batman*, *Superman*. I just loved comics. *MAD Magazine*. Anything that had words and pictures was the place for me.

SW: Did your parents think you were crazy?

JS: My dad read *MAD Magazine* to me. They thought it was fine. My dad was from a big family and he liked comic books. My mom and dad in the '40s when they were young read comic books. They loved Captain Marvel. That's why I did the *Shazam!* book with Captain Marvel in it. I did that for my mom. The name of the character Fone Bone came from Don Martin, the zany cartoonist in *MAD* who had real long heads and toes that flopped over. He had a generic name for all his characters like Mr. Fonebone or Mrs. Fonebone or Fonebone Boy or Girl. And that's where the name Fone Bone came from.

SW: Looking back at BONE now, it's hard to imagine a time when it wasn't popular. Was it a struggle to get BONE recognized?

JS: I started wanting to do BONE in the early 1980s. My original goal was to do a newspaper comic strip but I couldn't sell it. I couldn't get a syndicate interested in it. In the mid-1980s, I walked into a comic book shop and back then that was worse than you see on *The Simpsons*. There was always a cat sleeping on the comic books and unrelated hippie paraphernalia all over the place. I went in there because I'd heard about *MAUS*, and there I discovered that there was a whole second wave of the Undergrounds. The Underground as we think of it is Robert Crumb and sex and drugs, rock and roll and rebellion against the man. But the second wave was the Hernandez Brothers and Dan Clowes, Peter Bagge and Dave Sim.

I was surprised at how good these books looked. I grabbed them all and brought them home and read them all the way through. And I thought, "The art form of comics is alive," which is something I didn't see in newspaper comics at the time. This was before *Calvin & Hobbes* appeared in the paper. So I had given up on comics if the best they could do was *Garfield*. There wasn't much I could do with that. But here, hidden in this little hobby shop, in the back, there was a bright light of talent that nobody knew about, but I was so turned on I went home to my wife and said that I wanted to sell my animation studio (I ran an animation studio then) and I wanted to do BONE as an underground comic. She took it pretty hard but she agreed (and we can talk about that hilarious process later). But, when I began the process of getting started, I had to draw it. I had to sell it. I had to get it into stores. The first few issues didn't do that well. In fact, the first four issues, the sales were kind of bad. The sales got worse and worse and worse. There was a real moment when I didn't know if I was going to get to keep doing it or not. Sometime around the fourth issue, BONE started to get talked about in the comic book trade journals like *Comic Buyer's Guide* and *The Comics Journal*. Just little blurbs. Then I went to a show not open to the public that was just comic book publishers of which I was one, even though I was a little tiny one. Comic book stores were there, too. At the show I got a little bit of attention because I was actually the guy that drew the comic. And the other publishers were big like Marvel and DC. They didn't bring an artist, just the salesmen in suits. So I was able to get a lot of attention by saying, "Come here, and look at my book."

I got to know a lot of retailers that way. And out of the corner of my eye I saw Don and Maggie Thompson, who were the editors of the *Comic Buyer's Guide*, and who were really connected to fandom. These two had kind of created comics

fandom in the 1960s. I saw their faces as they saw my little drawings of a promo of what I had pinned up behind me. They looked at each other, took each other's hands and almost skipped down to me, because they were just big, happy, nerdy people, and that's the way they came over to me. They loved Walt Kelly and they loved what they had seen of the first three issues of BONE. The next week in the *Comic Buyer's Guide* (which was the most important comics journal at the time) they devoted two full pages to BONE. They ran examples of artwork and wrote about it, and they both just really loved it.

The next weekend I was in Oakland for WonderCon, where the whole comic book industry starts its year. And within five minutes I had Frank Miller (who did *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*) and Neil Gaiman (who did the *Sandman* books) clapping me on the back and saying, "I love your stuff," and "You're going to win an award next year," which turned out to be accurate. So there was a moment there when it was pretty scary, but then something turned it around. Magic.

SW: As you look back at BONE now, are there things that you would have done differently?

JS: No.

SW: *Rose* is part of BONE, but it's very different. How did that book come about?

JS: *Rose* was illustrated by a very good friend of mine -- Charles Vess. He is one of the most famous fantasy painters for people who enjoy paintings of elves and fairies in *The Lord of the Rings*. I thought that part of the story of BONE would look good with a real fantasy painter. The truth is that the story of *Rose* was only in my head. I never meant to write it out as a comic. It was meant to be Gran'ma Ben's back story. This is what happened to her. This is why she's so unhappy with the dragon. This is her relationship with her sister. I didn't mean to make a comic out of it. I needed to know it so I could write BONE. BONE takes place in a wooded hilly area that looks very much like New England, actually, about 35 miles from Columbus (Ohio), called Old Man's Cave. It's filled with waterfalls and gorgeous rolling hills and beautiful trees and ferns growing right out of rocks.

These are the things my friend Charles Vess likes to draw, and he was visiting me. So, I took him down to Old Man's Cave and was walking him through it. There are a lot of little interesting tiny places in the rocks and the caves and little

bridges over gorges. I was telling him, “This is where Gran’ma Ben was when she was young; this is where the dragons trained the royal family in the ways of the dreaming.” As I was telling Charles this story, all of a sudden he stopped me and said, “I want to draw that!” Up to that point I’d never intended to write it or share it with the public but I thought, “If Charles Vess wants to paint that then Charles Vess will paint that!” Then we sat down and I had to turn my loose notions about things that had happened to Gran’ Ma Ben and the dragons into an actual 200-page story.

SW: BONE took 12 or 13 years to complete and now it’s almost 10 years later and we have your new book, RASL. What took so long? Do you see yourself doing any short project?

JS: BONE is almost 1,400 pages long, and RASL is just a short story – 500 pages. It takes a long time to do a graphic novel. You have to write it and you have to draw it. Each chapter in RASL and BONE took two-and-a-half months to do. To create an entire book takes a number of years. You could do a graphic novel in a year, but it’s rarely going to be more than 100-125 pages long. So, to get a book of any substantial weight, it’s going to take a few years to do. I remember having conversations at Ohio State University (I’m from Columbus) and talking to Art Spiegelman (who did *MAUS*) and Will Eisner (who did *The Spirit* and the first graphic novel, *A Contract with God*). It was at the moment when it felt like graphic novels were about to break out of the comic book ghetto and get into libraries and bookstores, but it hadn’t happened yet. Art said something very observant: “Well, it just takes a long time to make a graphic novel. What we’re waiting for is for there to be enough solid books to have a shelf that you can count on that everyone knows is of quality and will sell and have high circulation. And we’re getting there. It took 12 years to do BONE. It took 12 years to do *MAUS*. It just takes a long time. But we’ve reached the point now where there are a good solid 20 books on that shelf, and it’s growing fast, don’t you think? What would you put the number at?

SW: A hundred.

JS: That’s right—you did a book called *100 Graphic Novels for Public Libraries*.

SW: A question about RASL, which is for a very different audience than the readers. Was that a conscious decision of yours, and do you see BONE and RASL as similar in any way?

JS: Yes. BONE is a comedy-fantasy, like the Marx brothers thrown into *The Lord of the Rings* and causing chaos, which is very fun and I love it. RASL is very different; it's a dark, gritty, crime novel with a lot of sci-fi in it. It has a noir feeling to it. But I didn't make the decision consciously to say, "OK, I did this, now I have to break with it and do this other thing to confuse people." It was while I was inking BONE late at night, about two in the morning (which is a good time to get work done because no one is emailing you or calling you). While I was inking BONE, I would have my laptop open and I would watch *The Maltese Falcon* and *The Big Sleep*, and I got very interested in that kind of storytelling. So I started reading Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler and I thought, "This is a very cool style of writing and I think I want to do a comic book about that." The idea of doing parallel universes and science fiction was because I always had an idea that it would be fun to explore, "What if you went to a parallel universe and you and everyone else had different relationships with each other? Maybe your best friend wasn't your best friend. Maybe someone you hate, you're married to."

I thought it would be fun to play with that idea. But I never thought, "Well, BONE is a children's book, so maybe it would be a good idea to write a more grown up book," and I'll tell you why: Because when I came up with the idea in 2000-2001, at that time BONE was not considered a children's book. It was being done for comic book readers and in the '90s there were no kids going to comic book shops and no women, just 30-year-old guys. So I did BONE for college kids and up. But I did it in the language of funny animals because I'm a huge Carl Barks and Walt Kelly fan. I love *Uncle Scrooge* and *Pogo* and I figured comic book heads would just like it. But when you take 12 years to do something, the comic book heads get girlfriends and get married and have kids. So, by the time I finished BONE, kids were reading it, and it was becoming a real children's book. Scholastic had approached me and wanted BONE as a children's book in 2005. By then I had RASL pretty much mapped out, and I knew it was going to be my next project. I thought to myself: "It's going to be a very different audience but it's too late now, and that's the book I want to do."

I do see things similarly between the two books. Anyone who reads BONE and then reads RASL will recognize the drawing, the way I make comics, the panel-to-panel syntax and the quest of the hero to understand the life forces that are all around us. That's very much part of BONE and a big part of RASL, too. But RASL has boobs in it so kids can't see it.

SW: How much research did you do in BONE and RASL?

JS: Quite a bit. I did a lot of research for BONE. I did a lot of research for RASL. With BONE, the research was mostly along the line of medieval history because it was taking place in a medieval forest with a *Sleeping Beauty* type world or *Lord of the Rings* world, so I wanted to know when I drew a horse-drawn wagon how that worked. How the horse was connected to the wagon, how did the wheels and the axle work? I didn't want any readers to stop and think I got it wrong. That was my point -- that you just accept it as a real horse cart and just move on. There was also more. What kind of food did they eat? How they prepared the food. I always had that going on in the back of my mind. I mixed American frontier kind of stuff into BONE because it wasn't supposed to be a European fairy tale, so I put a lot of colonial type things in Gran'ma Ben's house: a little pie heater that's very much a colonial thing. You'd heat up and bake a pie in the fireplace with one of these cast-iron plates.

In RASL, the research was very much about string theory. I spent two years studying string theory. I couldn't have an in-depth conversation with a physicist, but I understood as much as you can by watching 20 different NOVA episodes, and I also did a lot of research into Nikola Tesla (who most people know who he is now). When I started RASL, no one knew who he was. When I discovered him, the only thing I knew about him was that he was in that movie *Prestige* and David Bowie played him as kind of a mad scientist. Turns out this is the guy who was a rival of Thomas Edison, but Tesla invented alternating current. That was Tesla and not Edison. Isn't that amazing? How did we get through our whole lives in school and never hear of Nikola Tesla? He invented tons of things we use today. Radio -- Marconi did not invent radio, Tesla invented it. Patented it, and in fact, Marconi's original attempt to get a patent was turned down because it was so similar to Tesla's! But Tesla was his own worst enemy. He made enemies with J.P. Morgan among others and eventually the patent office overturned his patent and gave it to Marconi, and Marconi got the Nobel Prize for inventing radio. Tesla was arrested that same year for not paying a \$900 tax bill. So, he is a fascinating character who was his own worst enemy, who was written out of the history books and when he died he was working on a death ray, for real.

The death ray that's in science fiction is all based on what Nikola used to say about it. It was during World War II and he was concerned that the Nazis were getting close to Ukraine, which was where he was from. He was trying to get a meeting at the White House to show them his designs because he had it all worked out, all the intricate workings. He just needed them to bank roll it. Everybody thought he was crazy by this point anyway, because he talked to pigeons.

He had a meeting with the White House on June 7, 1942. On June 7 he was found dead in his apartment in New York City. The government went in and took all his papers. Stuck them in Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, which was in the original Area 51, and a bunch of his papers were never seen again. No conspiracy theories unless you want to make some leaps, because the Russians might have gotten him, too, or maybe the pigeons, we don't know. Once I discovered that some of his papers were missing, I was able to do a *Maltese Falcon* kind of story that was science fiction. I needed a Maltese Falcon, the thing that everybody in the movie needs to find and is obsessed with. I have Rasl discover Tesla's lost papers. He's got them and he's figured out how to go to parallel universes. That's what's going on.

SW: A more general question, Jeff: What inspires you? What keeps you going? What keeps you making comics in general?

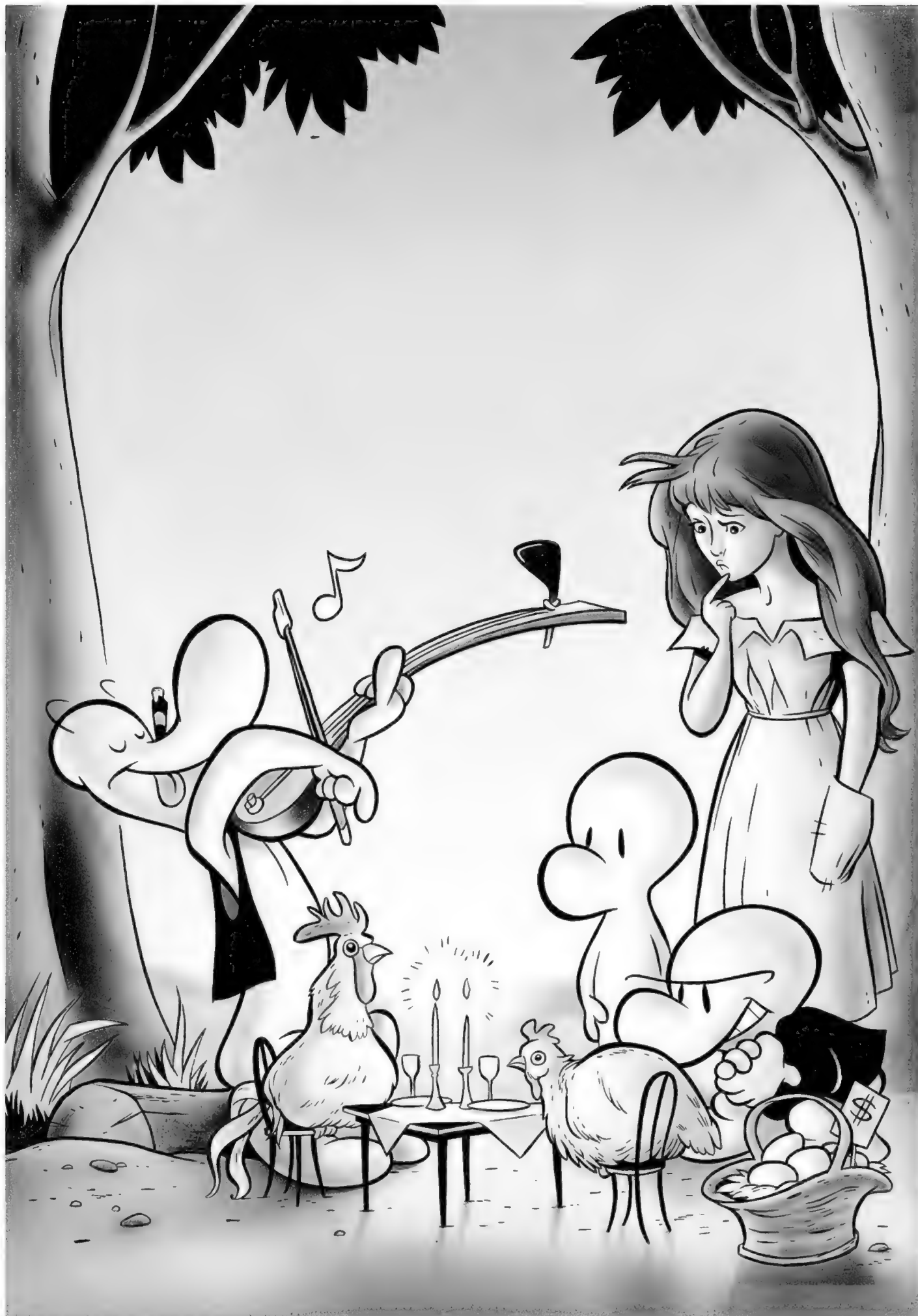
JS: I don't know how to do anything but make comics. That's what I do. When I get up I never go, "Oh man, I've got to make comics today." Never.

SW: Are there certain graphic novels or comics that inspire you? Ones that you turn to for sustenance?

JS: Well, there weren't many graphic novels when I started BONE. There was *Contract with God* by Will Eisner (which was published 35 years ago this month), *Dark Knight* by Frank Miller, *MAUS* and *Watchmen*. *Watchmen* I know is everybody's favorite graphic novel, but if you're not a superhero fan it doesn't do much for you. What I go to for inspiration are books and films more than graphic novels. *Maltese Falcon*, I'm a big fan of *Jaws*. I saw it when I was 15. In fact I was on Cape Cod and the family went to the beach. Nobody got in the water. I do watch *Jaws* quite a bit. There are a few films I'm not remembering just now. *Moby Dick* is a bottomless well of inspiration for me. *Huckleberry Finn* is one of the most perfect books. I take that back. It is a perfect book until you get to the ending and Tom Sawyer shows up and you say, "Oh, what?"

SW: Last question. If you hadn't become a cartoonist, what would you have done with your life?

JS: I would have been one of those guys you see on the streets pushing shopping carts full of stuff. There wasn't anything else for me but to be a cartoonist.



About the Authors

N. C. Christopher Couch teaches comics, graphic novels, science fiction, film and animation, and Native American art and culture in the Comparative Literature program at UMass. He has a Ph.D. in art history from Columbia University and is the author of books on Latin American art and comics, including *The Will Eisner Companion: The Pioneering Spirit of the Father of the Graphic Novel* (with Stephen Weiner); *Will Eisner: A Retrospective* (with Peter Myer); *Faces of Eternity: Masks of the Pre-Columbian Americas* and *The Festival Cycle of the Aztec Codex Borbonicus*; and *Jerry Robinson, Ambassador of Comics*.

Jeff Smith is The New York Times bestselling author/cartoonist of the *BONE* and *RASL* graphic novels. *BONE* won numerous awards around the world, including multiple American Eisners and Harveys, and the French Alph Art. In 2005, Smith's work was chosen to launch Graphix, an imprint of Scholastic Books. Smith was guest editor of *Best American Comics* in 2013.

Stephen Weiner's books include: *100 Graphic Novels for Public Libraries*, *the 101 Best Graphic Novels*, *Faster Than a Speeding Bullet: the Rise of the Graphic Novel* and *101 Outstanding Graphic Novels*. He is co-author of *The Will Eisner Companion* and *Hellboy: the Companion* as well as co-editor of the seven-volume series, *A Critical Survey of Graphic Novels*, and the prose novel, *Tom's House*. A recipient of the Comics Creator Guild Award, he holds a M.A in Children's Literature and is the director of the Maynard Public Library in Maynard, Massachusetts.

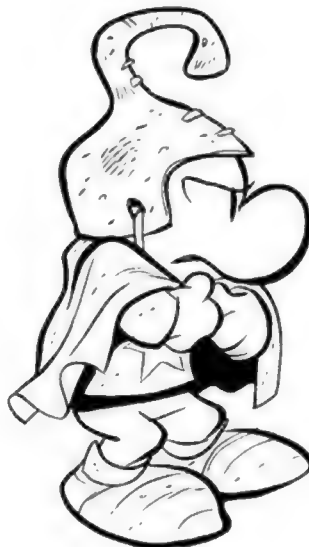
Acknowledgments

Jeff Smith

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Stephen Weiner

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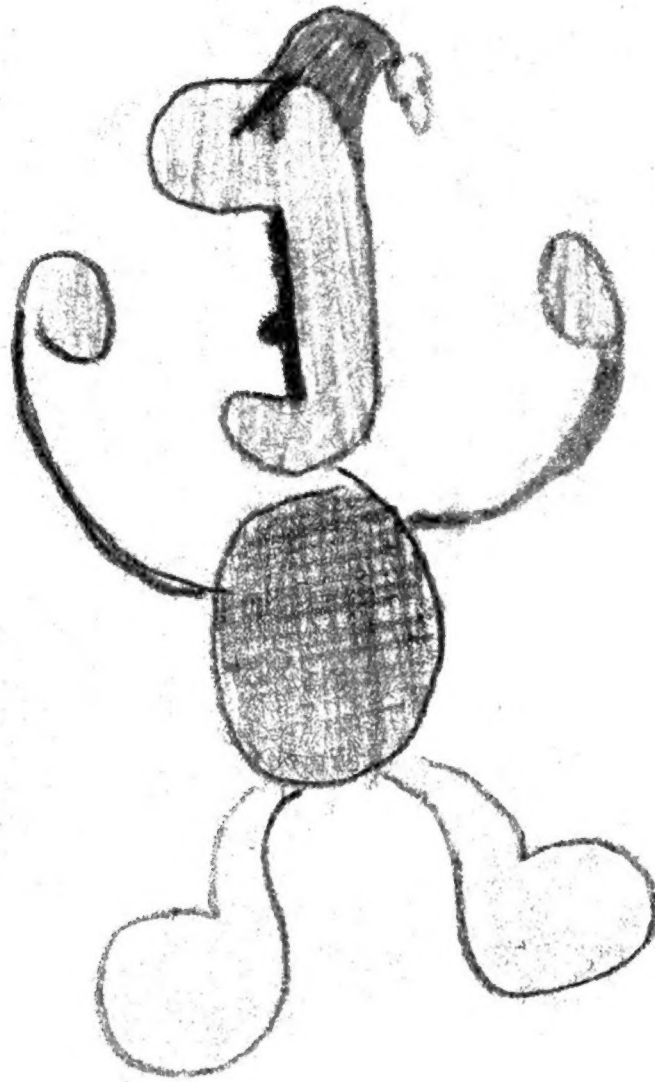
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The very first drawing of Fone Bone by Jeff Smith, circa 1965

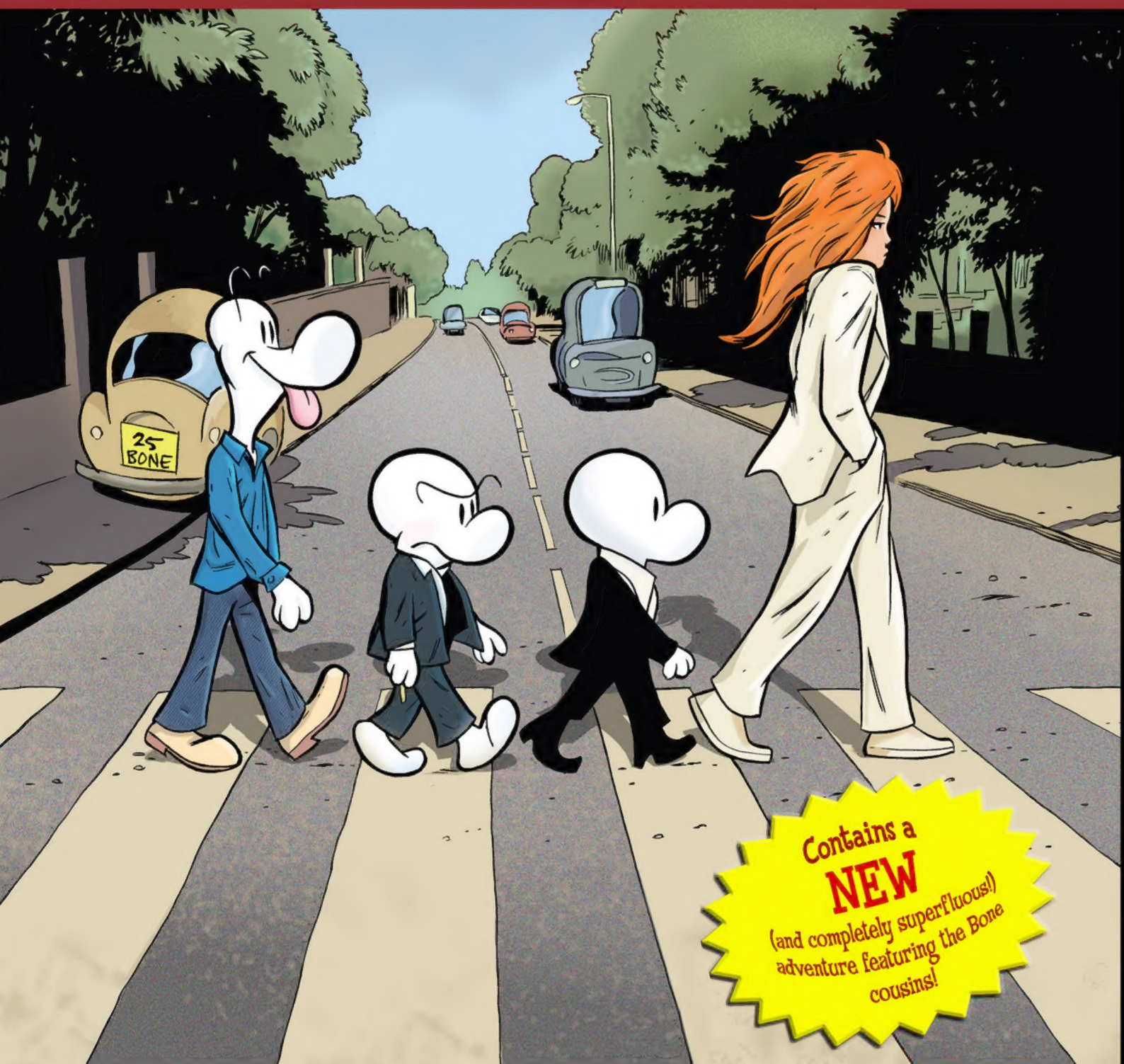
co·da ('kō-də) *noun*

1. the concluding passage of a piece or movement, typically forming an addition to the basic structure.
2. a concluding event, remark, or section.

25 years after the first black & white issue of the self-published comic book BONE appeared on comic shop shelves, and over a decade since the concluding chapter, BONE: Coda picks up right where the saga left off!

Ride along with the boys and their friend Bartleby the Baby Rat Creature as they brave the dangerous journey across the desert back to Boneville in their rickety cow cart. Creator Jeff Smith is back for a laugh with Fone Bone, Phoney Bone, and Smiley!

Also included is the complete text of *A BONE Companion* written by award winning comics historian Stephen Weiner. Fully illustrated for the first time!



The Archivist



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